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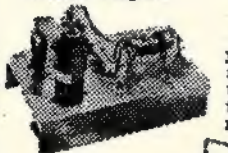

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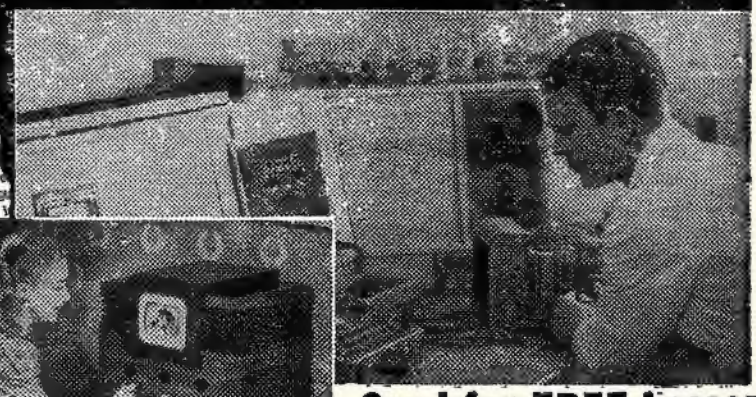

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The Man Who Cried "Wolf!"

THE moon had just come up. It was shining across the lake, and when Violet came in it cast a silver web over her hair.

But it wasn't moonlight that shone in sullen pallor from her face. It was fear.

"What's biting you?" I asked.

"A werewolf," said Violet.

I put down my pipe, got up out of the armchair, and went over to her. All the while she kept staring at me; standing and staring like a big china doll with glass eyes.

I shook her shoulders. The stare went away.

"Now, then," I said.

"It was a werewolf," she whispered. "I

She was half Indian and half goddess—but wholly evil!

By ROBERT BLOCH

heard it following me through the forest. Its paws padded over the twigs behind me. I was afraid to look back, but I knew it was there. It kept creeping closer and closer, and when the moon came up I heard it howl. Then I ran."

"You heard it howl?"

"I'm almost positive."

"Almost!"

Her eyes dropped into hiding beneath lowered lashes. She bent her head and sudden color flamed in her cheeks. I kept watching her and nodded.

"You heard a wolf howling near the cabin?" I insisted.

"Didn't—you—" she got out, in a strangled wheeze.

I shook my head, slowly and firmly.

"Please, Violet. Let's be sensible. We've been over this thing half a dozen times in the past week, but I'm willing to try again."

I took her by the hand, quite gently, and led her to a chair. I gave her a cigarette and lighted it for her. Her lips shook and it wobbled in her mouth.

"Now listen, darling," I began. "There are no wolves here. Wilds of Canada or not, they haven't seen a wolf in these parts for twenty years. Old Leon down at the store will bear me out on that.

"And even if, by some strange chance, a stray has wandered down here from the north, skulking around the lake, that doesn't prove anything about a werewolf.

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"You and I have enough common sense to be above such silly superstitions. Try to forget your Canuck ancestry and please remember that you're now the wife of an expert in the field of legend."

That crack about Canucks was pretty brutal, but I wanted to shock her out of the mood.

It had the opposite effect. She began to tremble.

"But, Charles, surely you must have heard something?" she sighed. Her eyes were pleading now. I had to look away.

"Nothing," I murmured.

"And when I've heard it prowling around the cabin at night, you heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"That night I woke you—didn't you see its shadow on the wall?"

I shook my head and forced a smile. "I'd hate to think you've been reading too many of my stories, darling," I told her. "But I don't know how to explain your—er—mistaken notions."

VIOLET puffed on her cigarette and the glowing tip flared up. But her eyes were dead.

"You have never heard this wolf? It has never followed you in the woods? Not while you were up here alone?" Her voice entreated.

"I'm afraid not. You know I came up here a month ahead of you to write. And I wrote. I saw no werewolves, ghosts, vampires, ghouls, jinns or efreets. Just Indians and Canucks and other citizens. One night, after coming home from Leon's place, I thought I saw a pink elephant, but it was a mistake."

I smiled. She did not smile with me.

"Seriously, Violet, I wonder if I made a mistake, having you up here. But I thought it would be like a bit of old times for you. After all, to a French-Canadian girl, this wilderness should be a treat. But now, I wonder—"

"You wonder if I'm insane."

The words crawled from between her lips.

"No," I muttered. "I never said that."

"But that is what you're thinking, Charles."

"Not at all. We all get these—spells. Any medical man will tell you that errors of perception do not necessarily indicate any—mental unbalance."

I spoke hastily, but I could see she was not convinced.

"You can't fool me, Charles. And I can't fool myself, either. Something is wrong."

"Nonsense. Forget it." I put the smile back on my face, but it didn't seem to stick very well. "After all, Violet, I should be the last one to even hint at such a possibility. People who live in glass houses, you know. Don't you remember, before we were married in Quebec, how I used to speak of you as a witch? I called you the Red Witch of the North, and I used to write those sonnets and whisper them to you."

Violet shook her head. "That was different. You knew what you were doing. You didn't see things, hear things that do not exist."

I cleared my throat. "I'm going to make a suggestion to you, dear. You haven't told anyone besides me about this, have you?"

"No."

"And it's been going on, you say, about two weeks?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't want it to go on any longer. I can see that you're worried. For that reason, and for that reason only—remember—I recommend that we call in Dr. Meroux. Purely as a consultant, of course.

"I have a lot of faith in his ability, not only as a physician but as a psychiatrist. You know psychiatry is his hobby—of course, he's only an amateur stuck away here in the woods, but he's a man of repute. I'm sure he'd respect your confidences. And he might be able to make a diagnosis that would clear the whole matter up in a jiffy."

"No, Charles. I will not tell Dr. Meroux."

I frowned. "Very well. But I'm interested in your ideas about a mysterious werewolf. I'd like to find out what you heard about *loup-garous* in childhood. That grandmother of yours—she was part Indian, wasn't she? Didn't she ever scare the daylights out of you with some wild yarns?"

Violet nodded. "*Oui*—yes, I mean."

I noted her reversion to the speech of her childhood, but pretended to ignore it.

"Did she tell you about the wolf-men, the

lycanthropes . . . who change their shape when the moon calls and run baying on all fours, their bodies shaggy shadows in the night? Did she tell you how they prowl for prey, tearing at the throats of their victims who in turn become inocculated with the dread virus of the werewolf?"

"Yes. She told me, many many times."

"Ah. And now, when you return to the wilderness, the image of your childhood fears arises. The werewolf, my dear, is merely a symbol of something you dread. Some inner guilt, perhaps, is personified in the hallucination of a beast-presence that lurks awaiting the time to reveal itself.

"I'm not even an amateur psychiatrist like Dr. Meroux, but I think I can safely hazard that such a delusion is natural enough. Now, if you'll be frank with me, perhaps we can dissect the nature of your fear, arrive at the real terror that disguises itself a snarling monster, a mythological hybrid that slavers at your neck in the forest—"

"No! Stop! Please, not now—I cannot stand to talk of it further."

Violet sobbed. I comforted her, crudely.

"Sorry. I imagine you're nervous enough as it is. We'll just forget about it for the time being, dear, and wait until you feel that you can face the problem. Better get some rest."

Patting her shoulder, I led her to the bedroom.

We undressed, got into bed. I dimmed the lamp, extinguished it.

The cabin was in utter darkness, save for the filtered moonlight that trickled through surrounding tree-tops. The lake beyond was a sea of silver fire, but I turned from its radiance and sank into sudden slumber.

Violet lay tense beside me, but as I drifted off I felt her relax, gradually and slowly.

We slept.

I do not know what time it was that I awoke. Violet's hand bit into my shoulder, and I heard the harsh inspiration of her breath.

"Listen, Charles!" she gasped.

I listened.

"Do you hear that? Outside the cabin—hear it scuffling against the door?"

I shook my head.

"Wake up, Charles—you must hear it. It's been snaffling around under the window and now it's scraping at the door. Do something!"

I swung out of bed, grabbed her arm.

"Come on," I said. "Let's take a look."

I banged into a chair searching for the flashlight.

"It's going away," Violet sobbed. "Hurry."

Flash firmly gripped in one hand, I dragged Violet across the floor towards the door. I halted, released her, snapped the lock free.

The door flung open. I swung the flashlight in a wide arc. The forest clearing about the cabin was empty of all life.

Then I tilted the beam down towards our feet.

Violet screamed.

"Look, Charles! There, in the earth outside the doorway! Don't you see the tracks—the tracks before the door?"

I looked.

There, clearly defined in the earth at our feet, were the unmistakable paw-prints of a gigantic wolf.

I turned to Violet and gazed at her a long time. Then I shook my head.

"No, dear," I whispered. "You're mistaken. I don't see anything. I don't see anything at all!"

II

THE next morning Violet stayed in bed and I went down towards town to see Lisa.

Lisa lived near the crossroads with her father. The old man was paralyzed, and Lisa supported him by doing Indian beadwork and basketry for the tourist trade.

That's how I'd met her, last month when I came up alone. I stopped by the roadside stand, intending to purchase a bracelet to send to Violet.

Then I saw Lisa, and forgot everything else.

Lisa was half Indian and half goddess.

Her hair was black. You couldn't imagine a deeper, more lustrous darkness—until you gazed into her eyes. They were two oval windows opening upon Night. Her face and features were delicately moulded in faintly burnished copper. Her body was

slim and strong, but strangely melting when clasped in an embrace.

I found that out very soon. Two days after I met her, in fact.

I hadn't meant to be so precipitate. But Lisa was half Indian and half goddess.

And she was all evil.

Evil as the night that perfumed the sable splendor of her hair . . . evil as the gulf-deep gaze of her eyes . . . the very pagan perfection of her body was instinct with the substance of sin.

She offered me the bittersweet corruption of that ancient and forbidden fruit known to Lilith. She came to me on moonless night, silent as a succubus, and I feasted on night and darkness.

When Violet came up, our meetings halted. I told Lisa that we must be careful, and she merely laughed.

"For a little while, then," she agreed.

"A little while?"

Lisa nodded, her eyes sparkling. "Yes. Only as long as your wife remains alive."

She said it quite naturally. And after a moment I realized that it was quite a natural remark to me. Because it was true, logical.

I did not want Violet any more. I wanted this other thing—this thing that was not love nor lust, but a wedding of my soul with an utter wickedness.

And if I would have it, then Violet must die.

I looked at Lisa and nodded. "Do you want me to kill her?" I asked.

"No. There are other ways."

"Indian magic?"

A month ago I would have snickered at the mere suggestion. But now, knowing Lisa, holding Lisa, I knew the suggestion was quite valid.

"No. Not exactly. Suppose your wife did not die. Suppose she had to go away?"

"You mean if she left me—got a divorce?"

"You do not understand, I see. Is it not true that there are places where they keep the insane?"

"But Violet isn't crazy. She's quite level-headed. It would take something very extraordinary to drive her mad."

"Like seeing wolves?"

"Wolves?"

"A wolf will follow your wife. It will plague her, torment her, haunt her when she is alone. She will come to you for explanations, for help. You must refuse to believe her. In a little while her mind—"

Lisa shrugged.

I asked no questions. I merely accepted what she told me. If Lisa went to the woods and consulted the *shamans*, or whispered prayers to darker dispensers of doom, I did not know.

All I know is that a wolf came to follow my wife. And I pretended not to hear anything, see anything. It was working as Lisa predicted. Violet was going mad. From somewhere she had acquired the notion that her nocturnal nemesis was a werewolf. So much the better. Her mind was going, fast.

And Lisa was waiting, smiling her secret smile.

Lisa waited for me this morning, in the little roadside stand near the crossing.

HERE in the sunlight she looked like a simple Indian beadworker. Only when her face was veiled in shadow did I see her eyes and hair, black and unchanging as her secret self.

She put her hand on my arm, and a touch of ice and fire shivered up my spine.

"And how is your wife?" she whispered.

"Not so well. Last night she found wolf-tracks beside our door. She had hysterics."

Lisa smiled.

"She thinks it's a werewolf, you know."

Lisa smiled.

"I wish you'd tell me the truth, darling. How do you make the wolf come and follow her?"

Lisa smiled.

I sighed. "I suppose I shouldn't be too inquisitive."

"That is right, Charles. Isn't it enough to know that our plan is working? That Violet is going mad? That soon she will be gone and we can be together—always?"

I stared at her. "Yes, that is enough. But tell me, what happens next?"

"Your wife will see the wolf. Actually see it. She will become quite frightened. You will refuse to listen to her, as before. Then she will go to the authorities. She will come to the village here and try to make people believe her. Everyone will think her mad. And when they ask you, you know

nothing. In a short time the doctor will be forced to examine her. After that—"

"She will see the wolf?" I echoed. "Actually see it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Tonight, if you like."

I nodded, slowly. Then a doubt came. "But she's almost overcome. She'll be too afraid to walk in the woods."

"In that case, the wolf will come to her."

"Very well. I shall erase the tracks, just as I erased them this morning."

"Yes. And you had better plan to go away from the cabin tonight. You are a sensitive person, Charles. You would find it painful to endure the sight of your wife's terror."

The image of Violet came to me—the image of her frightened face, her bulging eyes, her wide mouth opened in a scream of utter fear as the monster of her fancies crouched before her. Yes, that is how it would be, and very soon.

I smiled.

Lisa grinned back. As I turned away I could hear her laughing, and it came to me that there was something unnatural in her mirth.

Then, of course, I realized the truth. Lisa was not altogether sane herself.

III

WE ATE dinner in silence that evening. As the moon came up over the lake, Violet rose and pulled the shades with a grimace she could not conceal.

"What's the matter, dear? Is it too bright for your eyes?"

"I hate it, Charles."

"But it's beautiful."

"Not to me. I hate the night."

I could afford to be generous. "Violet, I've been doing a little thinking. This place—it's getting on your nerves. Don't you believe it might be helpful if you went back to the city?"

"Alone?"

"I could join you there when I finish my work."

Violet brushed a lock of auburn hair from her forehead. I noticed with a shock how the fire had faded from her curls. The luster was gone; her hair was dead and dull. Just as her face, her eyes, were dead and dull.

"No, Charles. I couldn't go alone. It would follow me."

"It?"

"The wolf."

"But wolves don't come to the city."

"Ordinary wolves, no. But this one—"

"Why do you think this wolf you—uh—see is not ordinary?"

She caught my hesitation but desperation overrode all reticence. She went on, hurriedly.

"Because it comes only at night. Because there are no *real* wolves here. Because I can sense the evil of the beast. It is not stalking me, Charles—it is haunting me. And me alone. It seems to be waiting for something to happen. If I went away, the creature would follow. I can't escape it."

"You can't escape it because it's in your mind," I snapped. "Violet, I've been very patient. I've neglected my work to take care of you. I have listened to your fancies for two weeks now.

"But if you can't help yourself, then others must help you. I took the liberty this afternoon of discussing your case with Doctor Meroux. He wants to see you."

She crumpled physically before my direct accusation and statements.

"Then it's true," she gasped. "You do think I'm—out of my mind."

"Werewolves don't exist," I said. "I find it easier to believe in the presence of a mental aberration than that of a supernatural entity."

I rose.

Violet looked up, startled.

"Where are you going?" she whispered.

"Leon's," I told her. "I need a drink. This affair plays the devil with my nerves."

"Charles. Don't leave me alone—tonight."

"Afraid of imaginary wolves?" I asked, gently. "Now really, my dear! If you want me to retain any faith in your mental stability, you'd better show me that at least you can be trusted to stay by yourself a few hours without collapsing."

"Charles—"

I went to the door, opened it. She winced as the moonlight trickled across the floor in

a silver pool. I stood there, smiling at her.

"Violet, I feel that I've been most patient with you. But if you will not see a doctor, insist upon staying here, and refuse to admit that you're mentally upset—then prove it."

I turned, went out, slammed the door, and walked briskly down the path.

It was a beautiful night and I inhaled deeply as I swung along towards the crossing a mile ahead.

Impatience set the pace for me. I was in a hurry to reach my destination. Actually, I had no intention of visiting Leon's tavern.

I went to Lisa.

Lisa's little cabin was dark, and I wondered if she had retired. Her aged father was already asleep, I knew. There would be no trouble from that source.

As I approached the cabin, I had already determined to arouse her, should she be in bed. A night like this was not meant for slumber.

A SUDDEN sound arrested me a short distance from the doorway. The door was opening, slowly. Instinctively I stepped back into shadow as a figure emerged from the cabin.

"Lisa!" I whispered.

She turned, came towards me.

"So you had the same idea," I murmured, taking her in my arms. Come on, let's get away from here. We'll go down towards the beach."

Silently, she walked beside me as I led her along the path that led to the water.

We stood staring up at the moon for a long moment. Then, as my arms tightened about her waist, Lisa turned to me and shook her head.

"No, Charles. I must go now."

"Go?"

"I have errands at the crossroads."

"Let them wait."

I cupped her face, bent to kiss her. She drew away.

"What's the matter, Lisa?"

"Let me alone!"

"Is there something—wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. Go away, Charles."

I really stared at her, then. And staring, saw. Saw that her face was unnaturally flushed, her eyes overly luminous, her lips parted more in protest than in passion.

She wasn't looking at me. She was looking through me, looking at the moon behind my body. Twin moons were mirrored in her eyes. They seemed to expand, enlarge, then replace red dark pupils with globes of silver fire.

"Go away, Charles," she muttered. "Go—quickly."

But I didn't go.

It isn't every day that one has the unusual opportunity to witness the spectacle of lycanthropic metamorphosis. And I was watching a woman turn into a wolf.

The first indication came in the form of respiratory change. Her breathing turned to panting; the panting to hoarse gasps. I watched her bosom rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall—and *change*.

Her shoulders sloped forward. The body did not stoop, but seemed to *grow* outward at a slant. The arms began to telescope into the shoulder sockets.

Lisa had fallen to the ground now: she writhed partly in shadow and partly in moonlight. But the moonlight no longer gleamed against her skin. The skin was darkening, coarsening, putting out hairy tufts.

Hers was an agony akin to that of parturition—and in a sense, it was parturition. She was giving birth, not to a new soul but to another aspect of her own. Agony and action alike were purely reflex.

It was fascinating to watch her skull change shape—as though the hands of an invisible scultpure were kneading and moulding the living clay, squeezing the very bony structure into new conformations.

The elongated head seemed miraculously shorn of curls for a moment, and then the fine fur sprang up, the ears flared outward, the pinkish tips twitched along a thickened neck.

Her eyes slitted upward, while the features of the face convulsed, then converged into a protuberant muzzle. The grimace of involuntary rictus became a snarl, and fangs jutted forth.

Her skin darkened perceptibly—so that her image was akin to that on an overdeveloped photographic print "coming up" in the hypo bath.

Lisa's clothing had dropped away, and I watched the melting of the limbs as they

foreshortened, furred, and flexed anew. The hands that had pawed the earth in agony now became paws.

The whole process occupied about three and a half minutes. I know, because I timed it with my watch.

Oh yes, I timed it carefully. I suppose I should have been frightened. But it is not given to every man—this opportunity of seeing a woman turn to a wolf. I regarded the transformation with what might well be called professional interest. Fascination precluded the presence of fear.

Now the metamorphosis was complete. The wolf stood before me, poised and panting.

OF COURSE, I understood. Understood why Lisa had few friends, why she spent so many evenings alone, why she had urged me to go away—and why she could so confidently predict the movements of the phantom wolf.

I stood there and smiled.

The feral eyes searched mine imploringly. I suppose she had expected me to exhibit shock, dread, or at the least a definite repulsion.

My smile was an unexpected answer. A whimper rose in the furry throat, changed to almost a purr. She was reassured now.

"You'd better go," I whispered.

Still she hesitated. I reached down and patted the lupine brow, still clammy from the pangs of transmutation. "It's all right," I said. "I understand, Lisa. You can trust me, you know. And it doesn't make any difference in my feelings about—the two of us."

The purring subsided deep in the great wolf's shaggy breast.

"You'd better hurry now," I coaxed. "Violet is all alone. You promised to surprise her."

The gray beast turned and padded off into the forest behind.

I walked down to the lake and watched the moonlight play over the water.

All at once the delayed emotional reaction came. Everything was clear—too clear.

I was in league with a girl to drive my wife mad. The girl herself was not wholly sane. And now I had learned she was a werewolf. Perhaps I was a little crazy myself.

But there it was. I couldn't think of an answer. I couldn't back down now. Things would go on according to plan. And in the end I'd get what I wanted. Or—would I?

Suddenly I began to sob.

It wasn't remorse, and it wasn't self-pity and it wasn't fear. It was merely a thought that came to me—the thought of holding Lisa in my arms and feeling her change; of kissing Lisa's red lips and suddenly finding, pressed against my mouth, the leering muzzle of a wolf.

My sobs were cut short by the far-off, mocking howl from the depths of the woods.

I put my hands over my ears and shuddered.

IV

ALL at once I found myself running through the woods. I couldn't hear any howling, but the sound of my own gasps roared in my ears. I ran madly, blindly, tearing my face and hands as I careened toward the cabin.

The place was dark. I panted towards the door, tried it and found it locked.

Violet screamed from within, and I was glad to hear her. At least she was—alive.

For the thought had come to me suddenly.

Werewolves not only frighten . . . they *kill*.

So her screams was welcome, and when I opened the door she ran sobbing into my arms; and that was welcome, too.

"I saw it!" she whispered. "It came tonight, peered into the window. It was a wolf, but the eyes were human. They stared at me, those green eyes—and then it tried to open the door—it was howling—I think I fainted—oh Charles, help me—help me—"

I couldn't go through with it. I couldn't carry out my plans in the face of her utter terror. Instead I took her in my arms and whispered what I could to comfort her.

"Yes, dear," I murmured. "I know you saw it. Because I saw it too, in the woods. That's why I came. And I heard it howling, too. I know now that you were right—there is a wolf."

"A werewolf," she insisted.

"A wolf, anyway. And tomorrow I'll go down to the crossroads and we'll get up a party and find the beast."

She smiled at me, then. She couldn't control her trembling, but she managed to smile.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, darling," I told her. "I'm here with you now. It's all right."

We slept that night in each other's arms, like frightened children.

And that's just about what we were, at that.

It was past noon when I awoke. Violet was calmly preparing breakfast.

I rose and did things to my haggard face with a razor. The food was ready when I sat down, but I couldn't eat much.

"The tracks are all around the cabin," Violet told me. Her voice didn't waver as she spoke—my belief gave her strength.

"All right," I answered. "I'm leaving for the crossroads now. I'll tell Leon, Doctor Meroux, some of the boys. Perhaps I'll go to the Mountie Headquarters if I can get a ride over there."

"You mean you'll join the hunt?"

"Certainly. I'm going to be in at the kill. It's the least I can do—or I'd never forgive myself for misjudging you."

She kissed me.

"You won't be afraid of staying alone, now?" I asked.

"No. Not any more."

"Good."

I left.

I did a lot of thinking during my walk to the crossroads. But my meditations were rudely interrupted when I walked into Leon's tavern at the crossroads and demanded a drink.

Fat Leon was talking to little Doctor Meroux down at the end of the bar. His arms were flying and his eyes were rolling, but when he saw me he halted and came up to where I was standing. He leaned across the bar and stared.

"Ah, *Meestaire* Colby, it is good to see you."

"Thanks, Leon. Been pretty busy lately—couldn't get in here very often."

"Is it at your cabin that you have been busy?"

Again the stare. I hesitated, bit my lip. Why should I hesitate to answer?

"Yes. My wife hasn't been feeling so well, and I've spent most of my time with her."

"It is lonely where you are, eh?"

"You know how it is," I shrugged. "Why?"

"Nothing. It is merely that I wondered if you chanced to hear anything these nights."

"Hear anything? What could I hear? Frogs and crickets, and—"

"Wolves, perhaps?"

I blinked. Fat Leon stared at me.

"Have you heard the howl of *le loup?*" he whispered.

My head shook. I hoped he was watching that instead of my trembling hands.

"Strange. One would think that across the lake the cries would echo."

"But there are no wolves around here—"

"Ah!" breathed Leon. "You are mistaken."

"How do you know?"

"Do you remember Big Pierre the guide—that dark one who lives across the lake from you?" asked Leon.

"Yes."

"Big Pierre left yesterday with a party bound for the river. His daughter, Yvonne, stayed behind to tend to the cabin. She was alone in the night. It is because of her that we know about the wolf."

"She told you?"

"She did not tell us, no. But this morning the good Doctor Meroux chanced to pass her door and paused to bid her good day. He found her lying in the yard. *Le loup* attacked her in the night, may her soul rest in peace."

"Dead!"

"Assuredly. One does not like to think of it. Doctor Meroux lost the tracks in the forest, but when Big Pierre returns he will hunt the beast down, yes."

Doctor Meroux edged along the bar, his mustache fairly bristling with excitement.

"What do you think of that, Charles? A renegade wolf loose in this territory—a killer. I'm going to notify the Mounted Police and see that a warning is given. If you could have seen that poor girl's body—"

I downed my drink and turned away hastily.

"Violet!" I muttered. "She's all alone. I must get back to her."

I hurried out of Leon's tavern, half-ran down the sunlit street.

NOW I knew where Lisa had gone after she left Violet. Now I knew that werewolves do more than change their shape.

I swung towards her roadside stand. It was closed. Abandoning caution, I hastened towards her door. The only response to my knocking was the querulous mumble of the paralytic old man within.

But as I turned away, the door swung open. Lisa stood there, blinking against the sunlight. She was pale, drawn, and her hair hung loosely down her bare back.

"Charles—what is it?"

I pulled her over to the shade of the trees behind the house. She stood there, staring up at me, her face haggard and her eyes dull with fatigue.

Then I slapped her, hard. She jerked, tried to dodge, but my other hand gripped her shoulder. I hit her again. She began to whimper softly, like a dog. Like a wolf.

I hit her again, with all my might. I felt a choking sensation in my throat and the words wouldn't come clearly.

"You little fool!" I muttered. "Why did you do it?"

She wept. I shook her fiercely.

"Stop that! You think I don't know about last night? Well, I do. And so does everybody around here. Why did you do it, Lisa?"

Then she understood, and knew that she could not hope to deceive me.

"I had to," she whispered. "You don't know what it's like. After I left your wife at the cabin I went back around the lake. It was then that it—came over me."

"What came over you?"

"The hunger."

She said it simply.

"You can't understand that, can you? The way the hunger comes. It gnaws at your stomach and then it gnaws at your brain, so that you cannot think. You can only—act. And when I passed Big Pierre's cabin, Yvonne was at the well, drawing water in the darkness. I remember seeing her there and then—I forget."

I shook her until her teeth rattled.

"You forget, eh? Well, the girl's dead."

"Thank *le bon Dieu!*" Lisa breathed.

I gasped. "You thank God for—that?"

"Certainly. For if she did not die—if she survived the bite of one like myself—she would become such an unfortunate being as I am."

"Oh." I scarcely whispered the word.

"Don't you understand? These things I do are not of my choosing. It is the hunger, always the hunger. In the past when I felt the—change—coming, I went far away so that no one would know. But last night the hunger came swiftly and I could not help myself. Still it is better that she is dead, poor child."

"That's what you think," I muttered. "Except for one slight detail. It ruins our plans."

"How so?"

"My wife won't be frightened by thoughts of an imaginary wolf any more. When she comes babbling of a haunting beast, no one will think her crazy. Everybody knows that there *is* a wolf, now."

"I see. What do you propose?"

"I propose nothing. We'll have to let matters rest."

Her arms were around me, her bruised face pressed to my own. "Charles," she sobbed, "You mean we won't be together—"

"How can you expect that, after what you did?"

"Don't you love me, Charles?"

She was kissing me now, and her lips were soft. It was not the kiss of a wolf but the warm, vibrant kiss of a lovely woman. Her arms were soft. I felt myself responding to her embrace, felt against the incredible crescendo of desire this girl could rouse in me. And I weakened.

"We'll think of something," I told her. "But you must promise me—what happened last night will never happen again. And you must not go near my wife."

"I promise." She sighed. "It is a hard thing to keep, that promise. But I shall do my best. You will come to me this evening, no? Then we can be together, and I will have you to protect me from my—hunger."

"I'll come to you tonight," I said.

Her eyes flickered with sudden fear. "Charles," she whispered. "You had better come *before* the moon rises."

V

WHEN I got back to the cabin, Violet was waiting for me outside the door.

"Have you heard?" she said.

"How do you know?" I parried.

"There's a man here to see you. He told me. He asked me about the wolf, and I mentioned what has been happening lately. He's in there now, waiting for you."

"You told him," I said. "And he wants to see me."

"Yes. You'd better go in alone. His name is Craigin, and he's with the Mounted Police."

There was nothing else to do but go inside.

I had never met a member of the Northwest Mounted Police before. Except for his uniform, Mr. Cragin might have been a big city copper. He had the manner and the mind.

"Mr. Charles Colby?" he said, rising from the armchair as I entered.

"Yes sir. What can I do for you?"

"I think you know. It's about the death of that little Yvonne Beauchamps, across the lake."

I sighed. "They told me at the crossroads. Wolf, wasn't it? Wanted to know if I'd seen any signs of one."

"Have you?"

I hesitated. That was a mistake. The big man in uniform looked up at me and smiled.

"It doesn't matter. Anyone who bothers to take a look around this cabin will see wolf-tracks galore. Matter of fact, there's a trail leading from here right around the lake to the Beauchamps place. I followed it from there this afternoon."

I couldn't say anything. I tried to light a cigarette and wished I hadn't.

"Besides," said Cragin, "I've been talking to your wife. She seems to know all about this wolf."

"Really? Did she tell you she saw one here last night?"

"She did." Cragin stopped smiling. "By the way, where were *you* last night when the wolf appeared?"

"I was in town."

"At the tavern?"

"No. Just walking."

"Walking, eh?"

The dialogue was far from sparkling, but it held my interest. I could see Cragin was leading up to something. And he did.

"Let's drop that angle for a moment," he suggested. "I have all the facts in the case anyway. Just checking now to see if we can discover the habits of this renegade. We're getting up a hunting party, you know. Don't suppose you'd be interested in joining it—out of your line, isn't it?"

I said nothing.

"Well, isn't it?" he repeated. "You're a writer."

I nodded.

"I'm told you do a lot of yarns about the supernatural. You just finished one about some kind of invisible monster, your wife says."

I nodded again. It was easy enough to keep nodding.

Cragin stood up, casually. "Do you ever get any funny ideas?" he asked me.

"Meaning?"

"Seems to me that an author like yourself would naturally be a little bit—different. If you'll pardon my saying so, I'd imagine that a man who writes about monsters must get a pretty queer slant on a lot of things."

I GULPED, but covered it up with a quick grin. "Are you inferring that when I write a story about a monster it's part of my autobiography?" I asked.

That wasn't exactly what he expected. I followed through.

"What's the matter with you?" I drawled. "Do you think I look like a vampire?"

Cragin forced a laugh. "It's my business to be suspicious. Let me see your teeth before I answer."

I opened my mouth and said, "Ah!"

He didn't like that, either.

I saw my advantage and seized it.

"Just what are you driving at, Cragin?" I demanded. "You know that my wife has seen a wolf around here. You know that it appeared last night. You know that it left here and apparently went around the lake, killed the girl, and disappeared.

"We've given you all the information you wanted. Unless, of course, you have a vague idea that I might be some kind of a monster myself. Maybe your scientific police theory points to the notion that I change myself

into a wolf, frighten my wife, and then go out and murder a victim in the dark."

I had him on the ropes now. "I'm not used to you backwoods Dick Tracy characters," I said. "Of course I knew that some of the half-breeds around here believe in ghosts and werewolves and demons, but I didn't think members of the Mounted Police adopted such superstitions."

"But really, Mr. Colby, I—"

My hand was on the door. I pointed, smiling pleasantly. "My advice to you, sir, is to go chase your wolf."

He took it, and departed.

I sat down and allowed myself the luxury of a good sweat as Violet came in.

For the first time, I was behaving sensibly. My direct attack had certainly dispelled any vagrant notions Cragin might have harbored. I had shamed him out of any faith he might possess in the element of truth behind werewolf-whisperings.

I decided to follow it up by doing the same for Violet. Casually, I recounted the details of our interview.

She listened in silence.

"Now, dearest, you see the truth," I concluded. "The wolf is real enough—but it's only a wolf. You thought it might be something more, because it exhibited intelligence. Doctor Meroux tells me that renegades like that are used to human beings and are much more cunning.

"But when it killed, it killed like an animal. It's a wolf and nothing more. Tonight they'll hunt it down and you can rest easier."

Violet put her hand on my arm.

"You'll stay here?" she asked.

I frowned.

"No. I'm going back to the crossing and join the hunting party. I told you I would last night. And it's a point of honor with me to be in on the kill."

"I wish you wouldn't—I'm frightened—"

"Lock the doors. A wolf can't unbolt locks."

"But—"

"I'm going hunting. Believe me, you'll be safer if I'm away tonight."

VI

THE moon had almost risen when I came to Lisa under the trees behind her doorway.

She stood there in shadow, and something caught at my throat as I realized, with relief, that a woman waited for me and not a wolf.

Her smile reassured me, as did her quick caress.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "Now we can be together. Oh, Charles, I'm afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. Haven't you heard? That Cragin—the Mounted Policeman—he has been talking. He came to see me today and asked if I knew anything about the wolf. Leon, down at the tavern, has been gossiping like an old woman about the way I go out at night. And he has been carrying tales of werewolves."

"You needn't worry," I soothed. Briefly, I repeated the substance of my interview with Cragin.

"But they are hunting tonight," Lisa insisted. "Leon has closed his place, and most of the men are following Cragin. They left at dusk, to go around the lake. They will start from Big Pierre's cabin and try to track down the wolf."

"Why should that worry you?" I responded, smiling. "There is no wolf. Tonight you and I will be together."

"That is right," Lisa answered. "I am safe as long as I'm with you." She gestured me towards the bluff beyond the trees.

"Shall we sit here and talk?" she suggested. "Leon is closed, but I went there earlier in the day and bought some wine. You like wine, don't you, Charles?"

She produced a jug and we sprawled on the grass.

The wine was sweet but strong. As the moon rose in the east, I drank.

Suddenly she gripped my shoulder.

"Listen!"

I heard it from far away—far away across the lake. The faint yelling of human voices intermingled with a shrill, monotonous yapping.

"They're hunting, and they have hounds."

Lisa shuddered. I drank deeply, drew her closer.

"There's nothing to fear," I comforted her. Nevertheless, as I stared at the sky I felt a rising fear; rising in proportion to the increased clamor from across the lake.

They were hunting a werewolf—and she was in my arms.

Lisa's proud pagan profile was limned against the pale and half-gnawed face of the moon above.

Moon face and girl face, staring at each other. And I, staring at both. . . .

When ye moon waxeth, so doth ye accursed taint in ye veins of ye werewulf—

"Lisa," I whispered. "Are you all right?"

"Of course, Charles. Here, drink!"

"I mean, you don't feel as if something is going to happen to—you."

"No. Not tonight. I'm all right. I'm with you now."

She laughed and kissed me. I drank to drown the dread I could not drive away.

"You won't bother Violet again? You'll stop prowling by night until this dies down?"

"Yes, of course." She held the bottle up to my lips.

"You'll be patient? You'll wait until I can think of another plan?"

"Whatever you say, lover."

I FACED her. "It may take time. Perhaps we can't be together as quickly as I'd planned. There may be no way out except divorce. Violet's strict about such things and she'll fight. The legal angle might take several years to work out before I was free. Can you stand waiting that long?"

"Divorce? Years?"

"You must promise me that you'll wait. That you won't harm Violet or—anybody. Otherwise we can't go on together."

She faced me, face in shadow. Then she bent low and sought my lips with her mouth.

"Very well, Charles; if that is the only way, I can wait. I can wait."

I drank again. Everything was very clear. Then it blurred. Then it was clear again. Yapping of hounds roared in my ears, then faded into a distant buzzing. Lisa's face loomed large, then swam out of sight.

It was the wine, but I didn't care. I had Lisa's promise, and Lisa's lips. I couldn't stand the tension any longer. These last few days had been perpetual nightmare to me.

I drank my fill of lips and wine.

Some time later, I slept. . . .

"Wake up!"

The voice rasped urgently in my ears. Suddenly I was being cuffed on the neck.

"Wake up, Colby! Hurry!"

I opened by eyes, sat up. The moon was high overhead, and its pallid rays fell upon the face bending towards mine—the face of Doctor Meroux.

"Sleeping," I muttered. "Where's Lisa?"

"Lisa? Nobody's here but yourself. Wake up, man—come with me."

I rose, lurched a moment, regained my balance.

"You all right?"

"Yes, Doc. What is it?"

"I don't know if—"

There was indecision in his voice and a hint of dread. I caught the hint, held it. Suddenly I was sober and shouting.

"Tell me, Doctor. What has happened?"

"It's your wife," he said, slowly. "The wolf came to your cabin tonight while you were away. I happened by and stopped in to see if everything was all right. When I arrived the wolf had already departed. But—"

"Yes?"

"The wolf had torn Violet's throat!"

VII

WE RACED in darkness, in a black blur born of the night without and the fear within.

Lisa had lied. She had given me wine, waited until I slept, and then struck—

I could think of nothing else.

We reached the cabin. Doctor Meroux knelt beside the bed where Violet lay. She turned and smiled at me, weakly.

"She's still alive?" I gasped.

"Yes. Her throat was torn, but I arrived and stopped the bleeding. It isn't too serious, but she's been badly frightened. Keep her quiet for a day or so."

I knelt beside my wife, pressed my lips to her cheek above the bandaged neck.

"Thank God for that," I whispered.

"Don't question her," Meroux advised. "Let her rest now. Evidently I arrived just after the attack. The wolf must have come in through the window. You'll notice the shattered glass. When I came near it bolted out again and scampered off. The tracks are all around."

I walked outside the cabin with him. It was as he said.

"The hunting party will be here shortly," he told me. "They can pick up the trail easily enough now, I think."

I nodded.

Suddenly the baying sounded from the forest. The voices of frantic men blended with the equally frenzied ululations of the dogs.

Doctor Meroux tweaked his mustache and turned. "They must have found it!" he cried. "Listen!"

Shouts and and murmurs. Sounds of scrabbling in the underbrush. A shrill cry. And then—

A volley of rifle shots.

"*Nom de Dieu!* They have it!" the doctor exulted.

Baying of hounds, closer now. Running footsteps snapped twigs in the brush beyond. Voices sounded near.

And then, out of the clearing before the cabin, crawled the wolf.

THE great gray beast was panting, spent. It dragged its broken body across the open space, leaving a black trail of blood. The huge head was lolling, fangs agape, and it wheezed painfully as it made its way toward us.

Meroux pulled out a revolver, cocked it. I held his hand.

"No," I whispered. "No!"

I walked toward the wolf. Its eyes met mine, but they held no recognition—only the glaze of descending death.

"Lisa," I whispered. "You couldn't wait."

The doctor didn't hear my mutterings, but the wolf did. The head jerked up, and for a moment a strangled sound issued from the shaggy throat.

Then the wolf died.

I saw it die. That was simple enough. Its paws stiffened, the head came down, and the wolf lay prone.

I could stand watching the wolf die.

What came next was not so easy to endure.

For Lisa died.

When I had witnessed the change from woman to wolf, I coldly timed it with my watch.

Now, watching the transformation of wolf to woman, I could only shudder and cry out.

The body expanded, writhed, flexed. The ears sank into the skull, the limbs elongated, put forth white flesh. Dr. Meroux was shouting beside me, but I couldn't hear what he said. I could only stare as the wolf-form vanished and Lisa's nude loveliness burst into view like a blossoming flower—a pale white lily of death.

She lay there, a dead girl in the moonlight. I sobbed and turned away.

"No—it cannot be!"

The doctor's harsh voice recalled me. He pointed with a palsied finger at the white form at our feet.

I stared and saw—*another* change!

This change I cannot bear to describe. I can only remember, now, that Lisa had never told me just how or *when* she had become a victim of lycanthropy. I can only remember that the feast of the werewolf preserves an unnatural youth.

For the woman at our feet aged before our eyes.

Woman to wolf—such a metamorphosis is hideous enough to behold. But more shocking still was this final abomination. The lovely girl became a raddled hag.

And the hag became—worse.

At the end, something incredibly old lay lifeless on the ground. Something wrinkled and shrivelled gaped up at the moon with a mummy's grin.

Lisa had assumed her rightful shape at last.

THE rest must have happened very swiftly. The men came, with the dogs. Dr. Meroux bent over the thing that had been wolf and woman, and now was neither. I fainted.

When I awoke the following afternoon, Dr. Meroux was dressing Violet's wound. She was well enough to be up, and she brought me some soup. I slept again.

The following morning Meroux came again. I felt strong enough to sit up, and to question him. What he had to report reassured me.

Apparently, Dr. Meroux had been wise. He had confirmed the werewolf story, but he did not identify the dead creature as Lisa. With Cragin's help, the matter was being

hushed up. After all, there was no point in any further investigation. For the sake of local policy, it was best for all concerned to let it drop.

Violet was almost her old self again.

Last night I made a full confession to her.

She only smiled.

Perhaps, when she is rested, she will return to the city and divorce me. I do not know. She had not offered forgiveness, nor any comment. She seems restless, perturbed.

Today she went out for a walk.

I have been sitting all afternoon, typing out this account. I imagine now, since the sun had set, that she will return. Unless she had already slipped off quietly to the city. Still, with that wound still half-healed, she probably wouldn't travel yet.

The moon is coming up across the lake, but I don't want to look at it. I can't seem to bear any reminder of what happened. By writing this, I hope to cleanse myself of the memories.

Perhaps I can find a measure of peace in the future. I'm sure now that Violet hates me, but she will get her divorce and I shall carry on.

Yes. She looked as if she hated me. Because I sent a werewolf to kill her—

But I'm rambling. I mustn't think of that. No.

And yet I have to think of something. I don't want to stop writing, yet. Then I'd be forced to sit here alone, while the night comes down like a dark shroud over a dead earth.

Yes, I'd have to sit here and listen to the stillness. I'd have to watch the moon rising over the lake, and wait for Violet to return.

I wonder where she has wandered today? With that wound in her throat, it isn't good for her to be out.

That wound in her throat—where Lisa bit her.

There's something I'm trying to remember about *that*. I can't seem to think clearly. But I know I'm trying to recall a point about her wound. It all ties in with my fear of the moonlight and being alone here.

What is it?

Now I know!

Yes. I remember.

And I pray that Violet has wandered off, that she does not come back.

She was restless today, and she went off alone in the woods. I know why she left.

The wound is *working*.

I RECALL what Lisa said when I told her that little Yvonne had died. She thanked God—because if Yvonne had survived her bite, she too would have become a . . .

Violet was bitten. Violet didn't die. Now the wound is working. And the moon is high, high over the lake. Violet, running through the forest, is a . . .

There! Outside the window—I can see her!

I can see—*it*.

It is creeping toward the cabin as I write. I can see it in the moonlight; the moonlight that glistens on the sleek fur along its back. The moonlight is gleaming on the black snout, too, and on sharp, pointed fangs.

Violet hates me.

Violet is coming back. But not as—a woman.

Wait! Did I lock the door? Yes.

Good. She can't enter. Look at her pawing at the outside of the door. Scratching. And whining, deep in her throat. That throat—those jaws!

Perhaps Cragin will come, or Dr. Meroux. If not, I'll spend the night sitting here. In the morning she will go away. Then, when she shows up again I can have her put away.

Yes, I'll wait.

But listen to that howling! It gets on my nerves. She knows I'm in here. She can hear me typing. She knows. And if she could get at me—

She can't. I'm safe here.

Now what is she up to? She isn't at the door any more. I can hear those paws padding, moving around under the window.

The window.

The pane of glass was shattered when Lisa came the other night. There is no glass in the window—

She's howling. She's going to leap in. Yes.

I see it now . . . the body of a leaping wolf against the moonlight . . . Violet . . . no . . . Vio . . .

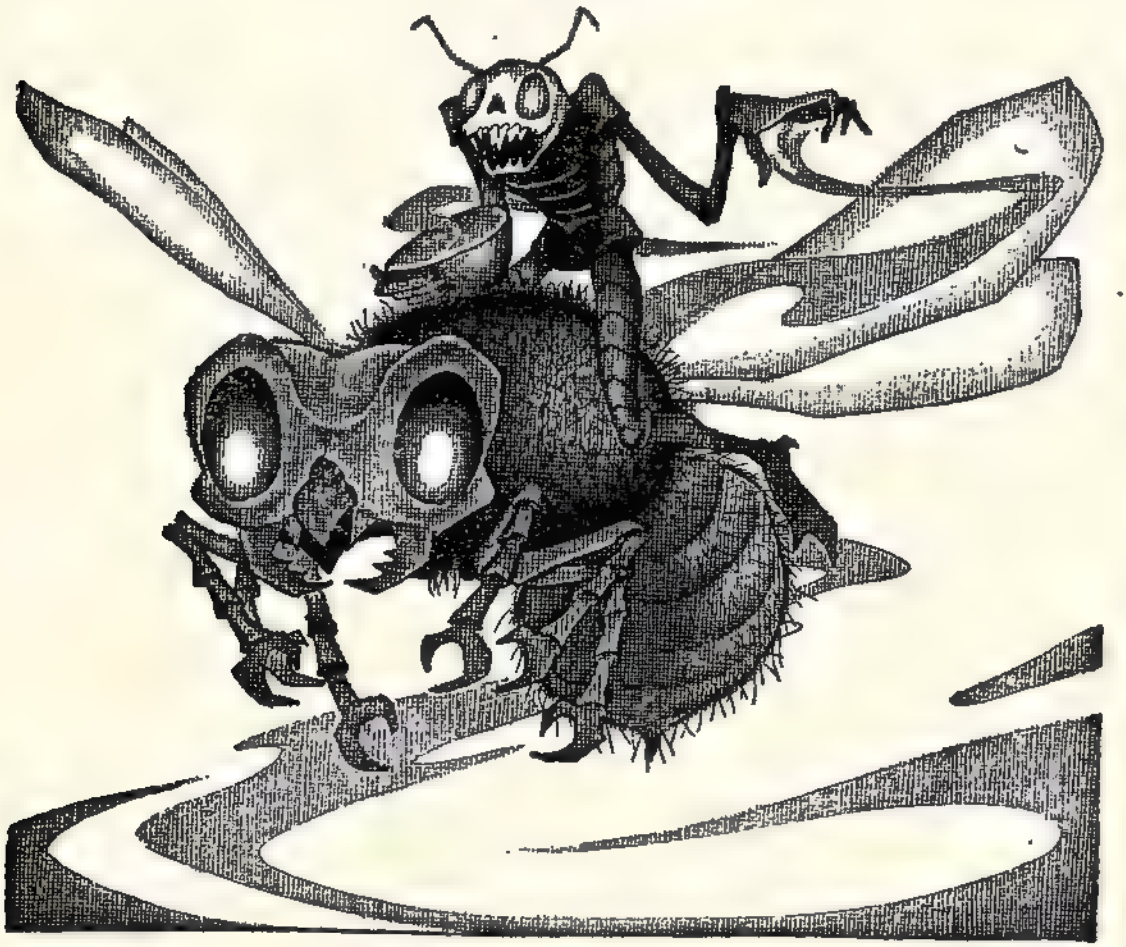
The Watchers

When did you last kill a fly? Yes, you! *Have a care . . . . and listen!*

By RAY BRADBURY

IN THIS room the sound of the tapping of the typewriter keys is like knuckles on wood, and my perspiration falls down upon the keys that are being punched unceasingly by my trembling fingers. And over and above the sound of my writing comes the ironical melody of a mosquito circling over my bent head, and a number of flies buzzing and colliding with the wire screen. And around the naked filament-skeleton of the yellow bulb in the ceiling a bit of torn white paper that is a moth flutters. An ant crawls up the wall; I watch it—I laugh with a steady, unceasing bitterness. How ironical the shining flies and the red ants and the armoured crickets. How mistaken we three were: Susan and I and William Tinsley.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, if you do happen upon this, do not ever again



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

crush the ants upon the sidewalk, do not smash the bumblebee that thunders by your window, do not annihilate the cricket upon your hearth!

That's where Tinsley made his colossal error. You remember William Tinsley, certainly? The man who threw away a million dollars on fly-sprays and insecticides and ant-pastes?

There was never a spot for a fly or a mosquito in Tinsley's office. Not a white wall or green desk or any immaculate surface where a fly might land before Tinsley destroyed it with an instantaneous stroke of his magnificent flyswatter. I shall never forget that instrument of death. Tinsley, a monarch, ruled his industry with that flyswatter as a scepter.

I was Tinsley's secretary and right-hand man in his kitchenware industry; sometimes I advised him on his many investments.

Tinsley carried the flyswatter to work with him under his arm in July, 1944. By the week's end, if I happened to be in one of the filing alcoves out of sight when Tinsley arrived, I could always tell of his arrival when I heard the swicking, whistling passage of the flyswatter through the air as Tinsley killed his morning quota.

As the days passed, I noted Tinsley's preoccupied alertness. He'd dictate to me, but his eyes would be searching the north-south-east-west walls, the rug, the bookcases, even my clothing. Once I laughed and made some comment about Tinsley and Clyde Beatty being fearless animal trainers, and Tinsley froze and turned his back on me. I shut up. People have a right, I thought, to be as damned eccentric as they please.

"Hello, Steve." Tinsley waved his flyswatter one morning as I poised my pencil over my pad. "Before we start, would you mind cleaning away the corpses."

Spread in a rumpled trail over the thick sienna rug were the fallen conquered, the flies; silent, mashed, dewinged. I threw them one by one in the waste-bin, muttering.

"To S. H. Little, Philadelphia. Dear Little: Will invest money in your insect spray. Five thousand dollars—"

"Five thousand?" I complained. I stopped writing.

Tinsley ignored me. "Five thousand dollars. Advise immediate production as soon as war conditions permit. Sincerely." Tinsley twisted his flyswatter. "You think I'm crazy," he said.

"Is that a p.s., or are you talking to me?" I asked.

The phone rang and it was the Termite Control Company, to whom Tinsley told me to write a thousand-dollar check for having termite-proofed his house. Tinsley patted his metal chair. "One thing I like about my offices—all iron, cement, solid; not a chance for termites."

He leaped from his chair, the swatter shone swiftly in the air.

"Damn it, Steve, has THAT been here all this time!"

Something buzzed in a small arc somewhere, into silence. The four walls moved in around us in that silence, it seemed, the blank ceiling stared over us and Tinsley's breath ached through his nostrils. I couldn't see the infernal insect anywhere. Tinsley exploded. "Help me find it! Damn you, help me!"

"Now, hold on—" I retorted.

Somebody rapped on the door.

"Stay out!" Tinsley's yell was high, afraid. "Get away from the door, and stay away!" He flung himself headlong, bolted the door with a frantic gesture and lay against it, wildly searching the room. "Quickly now, Steve, systematically! Don't sit there!"

Desk, chairs, chandelier, walls. Like an insane animal, Tinsley searched, found the buzzing, struck at it. A bit of insensate glitter fell to the floor where he crushed it with his foot in a queerly triumphant sort of action.

He started to dress me down but I wouldn't have it. "Look here," I came back at him. "I'm a secretary and right-hand stooge, not a spotter for high-flying insects. I haven't got eyes in the back of my head!"

"Either have they!" cried Tinsley. "So you know what They do?"

"They? Who in hell are They?"

He shut up. He went to his desk and sat down, wearily, and finally said, "Never mind. Forget it. Don't talk about this to anyone."

I softened up. "Bill, you should go see a psychiatrist about—"

Tinsley laughed bitterly. "And the psychiatrist would tell his wife, and she'd tell others, and then They'd find out. They're

everywhere, They are. I don't want to be stopped with my campaign."

"If you mean the one hundred thousand bucks you've sunk in your insect sprays and ant pastes in the last four weeks," I said. "Someone should stop you. You'll break yourself, me, and the stockholders. Honest to God, Tinsley—"

"Shut up!" he said. "You don't understand."

I guess I didn't, then. I went back to my office and all day long I heard that damned flyswatter hissing in the air.

I HAD supper with Susan Miller that evening. I told her about Tinsley and she lent a sympathetically professional ear. Then she tapped her cigarette and lit it and said, "Steve, I may be a psychiatrist, but I wouldn't have a tinker's chance in hell, unless Tinsley came to see me. I couldn't help him unless he wanted help." She patted my arm. "I'll look him over for you, if you insist, though, for old time's sake. But half the fight's lost if the patient won't cooperate."

"You've got to help me, Susan," I said. "He'll be stark raving in another month. I think he has delusions of persecution—"

We drove to Tinsley's house.

The first date worked out well. We laughed, we danced, we dined late at the Brown Derby, and Tinsley didn't suspect for a moment that the slender, soft-voiced woman he held in his arms to a waltz was a psychiatrist picking his reactions apart. From the table, I watched them, together, and I shielded a small laugh with my hand, and heard Susan laughing at one of his jokes.

We drove along the road in a pleasant, relaxed silence, the silence that follows on the heels of a good, happy evening. The perfume of Susan was in the car, the radio played dimly, and the car wheels whirled with a slight whisper over the highway.

I looked at Susan and she at me, her brows going up to indicate that she'd found nothing so far this evening to show that Tinsley was in any way unbalanced. I shrugged.

At that very instant, a moth flew in the window, fluttering, flickering its velvety white wings upon the imprisoning glass.

Tinsley screamed, wrenched the car involuntarily, struck out a gloved hand at the moth, gabbling, his face pale. The tires wobbled. Susan seized the steering wheel firmly and held the car on the road until we slowed to a stop.

As we pulled up, Tinsley crushed the moth between tightened fingers and watched the odorous powder of it sift down upon Susan's arm. We sat there, the three of us, breathing rapidly.

Susan looked at me, and this time there was comprehension in her eyes. I nodded.

Tinsley looked straight ahead, then. In a dream he said, "Ninety-nine percent of all life in the world is insect life—"

He rolled up the windows without another word, and drove us home.

Susan phoned me an hour later. "Steve, he's built a terrific complex for himself. I'm having lunch with him tomorrow. He likes me. I might find out what we want to know. By the way, Steve, does he own any pets?"

Tinsley had never owned a cat or dog. He detested animals.

"I might have expected that," said Susan. "Well, good-night, Steve, see you tomorrow."

The flies were breeding thick and golden and buzzing like a million intricately fine electric machines in the pouring direct light of summer noon. In vortexes they whirled and curtained and fell upon refuse to inject their eggs, to mate, to flutter, to whirl again, as I watched them, and in their whirling my mind intermixed, I wondered why Tinsley should fear them so, should dread and kill them, and as I walked the streets, all about me, cutting arcs and spaces from the sky, omnipresent flies hummed and sizzled and beat their lucid wings. I counted darning needles, mud-daubers and hornets, yellow bees and brown ants. The world was suddenly much more alive to me than ever before, because Tinsley's apprehensive awareness had set me aware.

BEFORE I knew my actions, brushing a small red ant from my coat that had fallen from a lilac bush as I passed, I turned in at a familiar white house and knew it to be Lawyer Remington's, who had been Tinsley's family representative for forty years, even before Tinsley was born. Remington was only a business acquaintance to me, but there I was, touching his gate and ringing

his bell and in a few minutes looking at him over a sparkling good glass of his sherry.

"I remember," said Remington, remembering. "Poor Tinsley. He was only seventeen when it happened."

I leaned forward intently. "It happened?" The ant raced in wild frenzies upon the golden stubble on my fingers backs, becoming entangled in the bramble of my wrist, turning back, hopelessly clenching its mandibles. I watched the ant. "Some unfortunate accident?"

Lawyer Remington nodded grimly and the memory lay raw and naked in his old brown eyes. He spread the memory out on the table and pinned it down so I could look at it, with a few accurate words:

"Tinsley's father took him hunting up in the Lake Arrowhead region in the autumn of the young lad's seventeenth year. Beautiful country, a lovely clear cold autumn day. I remember it because I was hunting not seventy miles from there on that selfsame afternoon. Game was plentiful. You could hear the sound of guns passing over and back across the lakes through the scent of pine trees. Tinsley's father leaned his gun against a bush to lace his shoe, when a flurry of quail arose, some of them, in their fright, straight at Tinsley senior and his son."

Remington looked into his glass to see what he was telling. "A quail knocked the gun down, it fired off, and the charge struck the elder Tinsley full in the face!"

"Good God!"

In my mind I saw the elder Tinsley stagger, grasp at his red mask of face, drop his hands now gloved with scarlet fabric, and fall, even as the young boy, struck numb and ashen, swayed and could not believe what he saw.

I drank my sherry hastily, and Remington continued:

"But that wasn't the least horrible of details. One might think it sufficient. But what followed later was something indescribable to the lad. He ran five miles for help, leaving his father behind, dead, but refusing to believe him dead. Screaming, panting, ripping his clothes from his body, young Tinsley made it to a road and back with a doctor and two other men in something like six hours. The sun was just going down when they hurried back through the pine forest to where the father lay." Remington paused and shook his head from side to side, eyes closed. "The entire body, the arms, the legs, and the shattered contour of what was once a strong, handsome face, was clustered over and covered with scuttling, twitching, insects, bugs, ants of every and all descriptions, drawn by the sweet odor of blood. It was impossible to see one square inch of the elder Tinsley's body!"

MENTALLY, I created the pine trees, and the three men towering over the small boy who stood before a body upon which a tide of small attentively hungry creatures ebbed and flowed, subsided and returned. Somewhere, a woodpecker knocked, a squirrel scampered, and the quail beat their small wings. And the three men held onto the small boy's arms and turned him away from the sight. . . .

Some of the boy's agony and terror must have escaped my lips, for when my mind returned to the library, I found Remington staring at me, and my sherry glass broken in half causing a bleeding cut which I did not feel.

"So that's why Tinsley has this fear of insects and animals," I breathed, several minutes later, settling back, my heart pounding. "And it's grown like a yeast over the years, to obsess him."

Remington expressed an interest in Tinsley's problem, but I allayed him and inquired, "What was his father's profession?"

"I thought you knew!" cried Remington in faint surprise. "Why the elder Tinsley was a very famous naturalist. Very famous indeed. Ironic, in a way, isn't it, that he should be killed by the very creatures which he studied, eh?"

"Yes." I rose up and shook Remington's hand. "Thanks, Lawyer. You've helped me very much. I must get going now."

"Good-by."

I stood in the open air before Remington's house and the ant still scrambled over my hand, wildly. I began to understand and sympathize deeply with Tinsley for the first time. I went to pick up Susan in my car.

Susan pushed the veil of her hat back from her eyes and looked off into the dis-

tance and said, "What you've told me pretty well puts the finger on Tinsley, all right. He's been brooding." She waved a hand. "Look around. See how easy it would be to believe that insects are really the horrors he makes them out to be. There's a Monarch butterfly pacing us." She flicked a fingernail. "Is it listening to our every word? Tinsley the elder was a naturalist. What happened? He interfered, busybodied where he wasn't wanted, so They, They who control the animals and insects, killed him. Night and day for the last ten years that thought has been on Tinsley's mind, and everywhere he looked he saw the numerous life of the world and the suspicions began to take shape, form and substance!"

"I can't say I blame him," I said. "If my father had been killed in a like fashion—"

"He refuses to talk when there's an insect in the room, isn't that it, Steve?"

"Yes, he's afraid they'll discover that he knows about them."

"You can see how silly that is, yourself, can't you. He couldn't possibly keep it a secret, granting that butterflies and ants and houseflies are evil, for you and I have talked about it, and others too. But he persists in his delusion that as long as he himself says no word in Their presence . . . well, he's still alive, isn't he? They haven't destroyed him, have they? And if They were evil and feared his knowledge, wouldn't they have destroyed him long since?"

"Maybe they're playing with him?" I wondered. "You know it is strange. The Elder Tinsley was on the verge of some great discovery when he was killed. It sort of fits a pattern."

"I'd better get you out of this hot sun," laughed Susan, swerving the car into a shady lane.

THE next Sunday morning, Bill Tinsley and Susan and I attended church and sat in the middle of the soft music and the vast muteness and quiet color. During the service, Bill began to laugh to himself until I shoved him in the ribs and asked him what was wrong.

"Look at the Reverend up there," replied Tinsley, fascinated. "There's a fly on his bald spot. A fly in church. They go everywhere, I tell you. Let the minister talk, it won't do a bit of good. Oh, gentle, Lord."

After the service we drove for a picnic lunch in the country under a warm blue sky. A few times, Susan tried to get Bill on the subject of his fear, but Bill only pointed at the train of ants swarming across the picnic linen and shook his head, angrily. Later, he apologized and with a certain tenseness, asked us to come up to his house that evening, he couldn't go on much longer by himself, he was running low on funds, the business was liable to go on the rocks, and he needed us. Susan and I held onto his hands and understood. In a matter of forty minutes we were inside the locked study of his house, cocktails in our midst, with Tinsley pacing anxiously back and forth, dandling his familiar flyswatter, searching the room and killing two flies before he made his speech.

He tapped the wall. "Metal. No maggots, ticks, woodbeetles, termites. Metal chairs, metal everything. We're alone, aren't we?"

I looked around. "I think so."

"Good." Bill drew in a breath and exhaled. "Have you ever wondered about God and the Devil and the Universe, Susan, Steve? Have you ever realized how cruel the world is? How we try to get ahead, but are hit over the head every time we succeed a fraction?" I nodded silently, and Tinsley went on. "You sometimes wonder where God is, or where the Forces of Evil are. You wonder how these forces get around, if they are invisible angels. Well, the solution is simple and clever and scientific. We are being watched constantly. Is there ever a minute in our lives that passes without a fly buzzing in our room with us, or an ant crossing our path, or a flea on a dog, or a cat itself, or a beetle or moth rushing through the dark, or a mosquito skirting around a netting?"

Susan said nothing, but looked at Tinsley easily and without making him self-conscious. Tinsley sipped his drink.

"Small winged things we pay no heed to, that follow us every day of our lives, that listen to our prayers and our hopes and our desires and fears, that listen to us and then tell what there is to be told to Him or Her or It, or whatever Force sends them out into the world."

"Oh, come now," I said impulsively.

To my surprise, Susan hushed me. "Let him finish," she said. Then she looked at Tinsley. "Go on."

Tinsley said, "It sounds silly, but I've gone about this in a fairly scientific manner. First, I've never been able to figure out a reason for so many insects, for their varied profusion. They seem to be nothing but irritants to we mortals, at the very least. Well, a very simple explanation is as follows: the government of Them is a small body, it may be one person alone, and It or They can't be everywhere. Flies can be. So can ants and other insects. And since we mortals cannot tell one ant from another, all identity is impossible and one fly is as good as another, their set-up is perfect. There are so many of them and there have been so many for years, that we pay no attention to them. Like Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter,' they are right before our eyes and familiarity has blinded us to them."

"I don't believe any of that," I said directly.

"Let me finish!" cried Tinsley, hurriedly. "Before you judge. There is a Force, and it must have a contactual system, a communicative set-up, so that life can be twisted and adjusted according to each individual. Think of it, billions of insects, checking, correlating and reporting on their special subjects, controlling humanity!"

"Look here!" I burst out. "You've grown worse ever since that accident back when you were a kid! You've let it feed on your mind! You can't go on fooling yourself!" I got up.

"Steve!" Susan rose, too, her cheeks reddening. "You won't help with talk like that! Sit down." She pressed against my chest. Then she turned rapidly to Tinsley. "Bill, if what you say should be true, if all of your plans, your insect-proofing your house, your silence in the presence of their small winged creatures, your campaign, your ant pastes and pitifully small insect sprays, should really mean something, why are you still alive?"

"Why?" shouted Tinsley. "Because, I've worked alone."

"But if there is a They, Bill, They have known of you for a month now, because Steve and I have told them, haven't we Steve, and yet you live. Isn't that proof that you must be wrong."

"You told them? You told!" Tinsley's eyes showed white and furious. "No, you didn't, I made Steve promise!"

"Listen to me." Susan's voice shook him, as she might shake a small boy by the scruff of his neck. "Listen, before you scream. Will you agree to an experiment?"

"What kind of experiment?"

"From now on, all of your plans will be above-board, in the open. If nothing happens to you in the next eight weeks, then you'll have to agree that your fears are baseless."

"But they'll kill me!"

"Listen! Steve and I will stake our lives on it, Bill. If you die, Steve and I'll die with you. I value my life greatly, Bill, and Steve values his. We don't believe in your horrors, and we want to get you out of this."

Tinsley hung his head and looked at the floor. "I don't know. I don't know."

"Eight weeks, Bill. You can go on the rest of your life, if you wish, manufacturing insecticides, but for God's sake don't have a nervous breakdown over it. The very fact of your living should be some sort of proof that They bear you no ill-will, and have left you intact?"

TINSLEY had to admit to that. But he was reluctant to give in. He murmured almost to himself, "This is the beginning of the campaign. It might take a thousand years, but in the end we can liberate ourselves."

"You can be liberated in eight weeks, Bill, don't you see? If we can prove that insects are blameless? For the next eight weeks, carry on your campaign, advertise it in weekly magazines and papers, thrust it to the hilt, tell everyone, so that if you should die, the word will be left behind. Then, when the eight weeks are up, you'll be liberated and free, and won't that feel good to you, Bill, after all these years?"

Something happened then that startled us. Buzzing over our heads, a fly came by. It had been in the room with us all the time, and yet I had sworn that, earlier, I had seen none. Tinsley began to shiver. I didn't know what I was doing, I seemed to react mechanically to some inner drive. I grabbed at the air and caught the tight buzzing in a cupped hand. Then I crushed it hard, staring at

Bill and Susan. Their faces were chalky.

"I got it," I said, crazily. "I got the damned thing, and I don't know why."

I opened my hand. The fly dropped to the floor. I stepped on it as I had seen Bill often step on them, and my body was cold for no reason. Susan stared at me as if she'd lost her last friend.

"What am I saying?" I cried. "I don't believe a damn word of all this filth!"

It was dark outside the thick-glassed window. Tinsley managed to light a cigarette and then, because all three of us were in a strange state of nerves, offered to let us have rooms in the house for the night. Susan said she would stay if: "you promise to give the eight-week trial a chance."

"You'd risk your life on it?" Bill couldn't make Susan out.

Susan nodded gravely. "We'll be joking about it next year."

Bill said, "All right. The eight-week trial it is."

My room, upstairs, had a fine view of the spreading country hills. Susan stayed in the room next to mine, and Bill slept across the hall. Lying in bed I heard the crickets chirping outside my window, and I could hardly bear the sound.

I closed the window.

Later in the night I got no sleep so I began imagining that a mosquito was soaring freely about in the dark of my room. Finally, I robed myself and fumbled down to the kitchen, not actually hungry, but wanting something to do to stop my nervousness. I found Susan bending over the refrigerator trays, selecting food.

We looked at one another. We handed plates of stuff to the table and sat stiffly down. The world was unreal to us. Somehow, being around Tinsley made the universe insecure and misty underfoot. Susan, for all her training and mind-culture, was still a woman, and deep under, women are superstitious.

To top it all, we were about to plunge our knives into the half-shattered carcass of a chicken when a fly landed upon it.

We sat looking at the fly for five minutes. The fly walked around on the chicken, flew up, circled, and came back to promenade a drumstick.

We put the chicken back in the ice-box, joking very quietly about it, talked uneasily for awhile, and returned upstairs, where we shut our doors and felt alone. I climbed into bed and began having bad dreams before I shut my eyes. My wrist-watch set up an abominable loud clicking in the blackness, and it had clicked several thousand times when I heard the scream.

I DON'T mind hearing a woman scream occasionally, but a man's scream is so strange, and is heard so rarely, that when it finally comes, it turns your blood into an arctic torrent. The screaming seemed to be borne all through the house and it seemed I heard some frantic words babbled that sounded like, "Now I know why They let me live!"

I pulled the door wide in time to see Tinsley running down the hall, his clothing drenched and soaked, his body wet from head to foot. He turned when he saw me, and cried out, "Stay away from me, oh God, Steve, don't touch me, or it'll happen to you, too! I was wrong! I was wrong, yes, but near the truth, too, so very near!"

Before I could prevent him, he had descended the stairs and slammed the door below. Susan suddenly stood beside me. "He's gone mad for certain this time, Steve, we've got to stop him."

A noise from the bathroom drew my attention. Peering in, I turned off the shower which was steaming hot, drumming insistently, scaldingly, on the yellow tiles.

Bill's car thundered into life, a jerking of gears, and the car careened down the road at an insane speed.

"We've got to follow him," insisted Susan. "He'll kill himself! He's trying to run away from something. Where's your car?"

We ran to my car through a cold wind, under very cold stars, climbed in, warmed the motor, and were off, bewildered and breathless. "Which way?" I shouted.

"He went east, I'm certain."

"East it is, then." I poked up the speed and muttered, "Oh, Bill, you idiot, you fool. Slow down. Come back. Wait for me, you nut." I felt Susan's arm creep through my elbow and hold tight. She whispered, "Faster!" and I said, "We're going sixty now, and there are some bad turns coming!"

The night had gotten into us; the talk of insects, the wind, the roaring of the tires over hard concrete, the beating of our frightened hearts. "There!" Susan pointed. I saw a gash of light cutting through the hills a mile away. "More speed, Steve!"

More speed. Aching foot pressing out the miles, motor thundering, stars wheeling crazily overhead, lights cutting the dark away into dismembered sections. And in my mind I saw Tinsley again, in the hall, drenched to the skin. He had been standing under the hot, scalding shower! Why? Why?

"Bill, stop, you idiot! Stop driving! Where are you going, what are you running away from, Bill?"

We were catching up with him now. We drew closer, yard by yard, bit by bit, around curves where gravity yanked at us and tried to smash us against huge granite bulwarks of earth, over hills and down into night-filled valleys, over streams and bridges, around curves again.

"He's only about six hundred yards ahead, now," said Susan.

"We'll get him." I twisted the wheel. "So help me God, we'll get to him!"

Then, quite unexpectedly, it happened.

TINSLEY'S car slowed down. It slowed and crept along the road. We were on a straight length of concrete that continued for a mile in a firm line, no curves or hills. His car slowed to a crawling, puttering pace. By the time we pulled up in back of him, Tinsley's roadster was going three miles an hour, just poking along at a pace like a man walking, its lights glaring.

"Steve—" Susan's fingernails cut my wrist, tight, hard. "Something's—wrong."

I knew it. I honked the horn. Silence. I honked again and it was a lonely, blatant sound in the darkness and the emptiness. I parked the car. Tinsley's car moved on like a metal snail ahead of us, its exhaust whispering to the night. I opened the door and slid out. "Stay here," I warned Susan. In the reflected glare her face was like snow and her lips were trembling.

I ran to the car, calling, "Bill, Bill—!"

Tinsley didn't answer. He couldn't.

He just lay there behind the wheel, quietly, and the car moved ahead, slowly, so very slowly.

I got sick to my stomach. I reached in and braked the car and cut the ignition, not looking at him, my mind working in a slow kind of new and frightened horror.

I looked once more at Bill where he slumped with his head back.

It didn't do any good to kill flies, kill moths, kill termites, kill mosquitoes. The Evil ones were too clever for that.

Kill all the insects you find, destroy the dogs and the cats and the birds, the weasels and the chipmunks, and the termites, and all animals and insects in the world, it can be done, eventually by man, killing, killing killing, and after you are finished, after that job is done you still have—microbes.

Bacteria. Microbes. Yes. Unicellular and bi-cellular and multi-cellular microscopic life!

Millions of them, billions of them on every pore, on every inch of flesh of your body. On your lips when you speak, inside your ears when you listen, on your skin when you feel, on your tongue when you taste, in your eyes when you see! You can't wash them off, you can't destroy all of them in the world! It would be an impossible task, impossible! You discovered that, didn't you, Bill. I stared at him. We almost convinced you, didn't we, Bill, that insects were not guilty, were not Watchers. We were right about that part of it. We convinced you and you got to thinking tonight, and you hit upon the real crux of the situation. Bacteria. That's why the shower was running at home just now! But you can't kill bacteria fast enough. They multiply and multiply, instantly!

I looked at Bill, slumped there. "The flyswatter, you thought the flyswatter was enough. That's a—laugh."

Bill, is that you lying there with your body changed by leprosy and gangrene and tuberculosis and malaria and bubonic all at once? Where is the skin of your face, Bill, and the flesh of your bones, your fingers lying clenched to the steering wheel. Oh, God, Tinsley, the color and the smell of you—the rotting fetid combination of disease you are!

Microbes. Messengers. Millions of them. Billions of them.

God can't be everywhere at once. Maybe He invented flies, insects to watch his peoples.

But the Evil Ones were brilliant, too. They invented bacteria!

Bill, you look so *different*. . . .

You'll not tell your secret to the world now. I returned to Susan, looked in at her, not able to speak. I could only point for her to go home, without me. I had a job to do, to drive Bill's car into the ditch and set fire to him and it. Susan drove away, not looking back.

AND now, tonight, a week later, I am typing this out for what it is worth, here and now, in the summer evening, with flies buzzing about my room. Now I realize why Bill Tinsley lived so long. While his efforts were directed against insects, ants, birds, animals, who were representatives of the Good Forces, the Evil Forces let him go ahead. Tinsley, unaware, was working for the Evil Ones. But when he comprehended that bacteria were the real enemy, and were more numerous and invisibly insidious, then the Evil Ones demolished him.

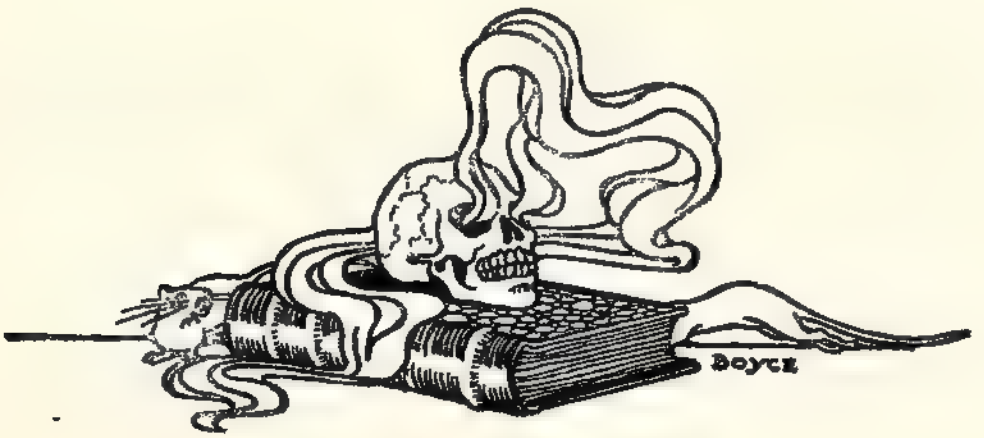
In my mind, I still remember the picture of the Elder Tinsley's death when he was shot as a result of the quail flying against his gun. On the face of it, it doesn't seem to fit into the picture. Why would the quail, representative of Good, kill the Elder Tinsley? The answer to this comes clear now. Quail, too, have disease, and disease disrupts their neutral set-up, and disease, on that day long ago, caused the birds to strike down Tinsley's weapon, killing him, and thus, subtly, animals and insects.

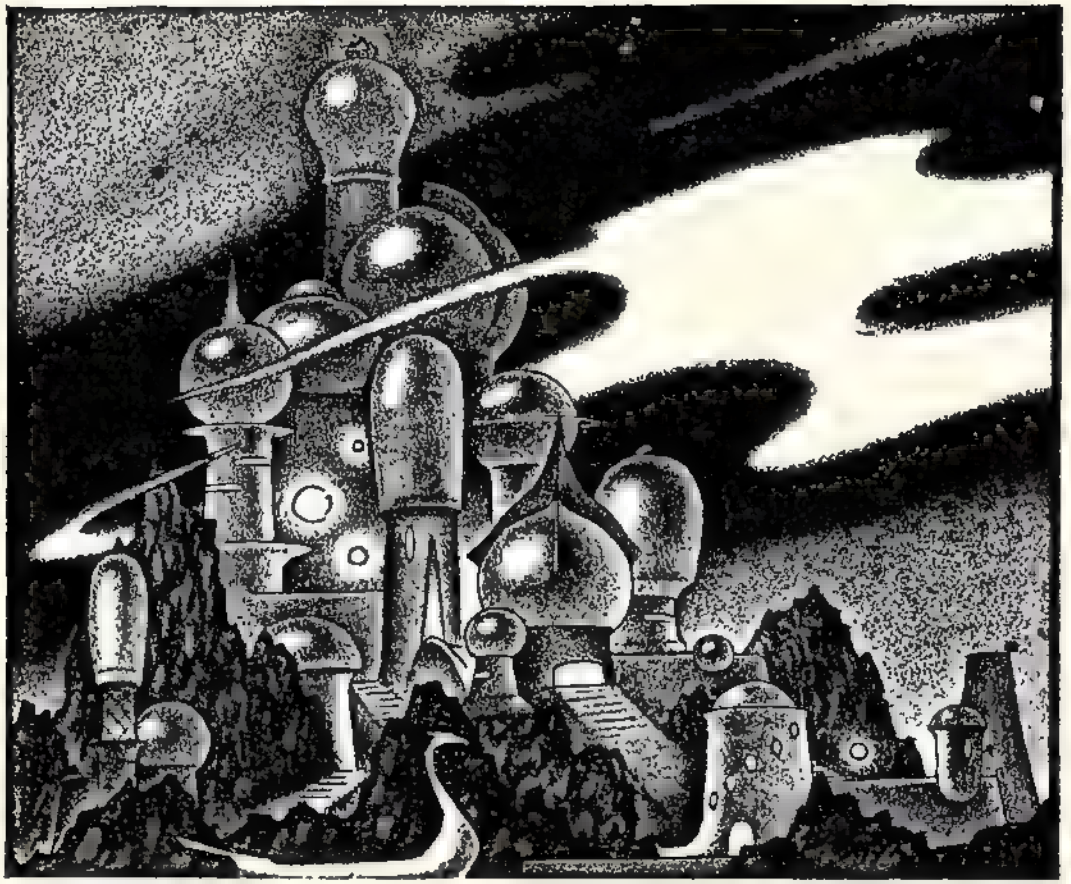
And another thought in my mind is the picture of the Elder Tinsley as he lay covered with ants in a red, quivering blanket. And I wonder if perhaps they were not giving solace to him in his dying and decay, talking in some silent mandibled tongue none of us can hear until we die. Or perhaps they are all.

The game of chess continues, Good against Evil, I hope. And I am losing.

Tonight I sit here writing and waiting, and my skin itches and softens, and Susan is on the other side of town, unaware, safe from this knowledge which I must set on paper even if it kills me. I listen to the flies, as if to detect some good message in their uneven whirring, but I hear nothing.

Even as I write, the skin of my fingers loosens and changes color and my face feels partially dry and flaking, partially wet, slippery and released from its anchorage of softening bone, my eyes water with a kind of leprosy and my skin darkens with something akin to bubonic, my stomach gripes me with sickening gastric wrenches, my tongue tastes bitter and acid, my teeth loosen in my mouth, my ears ring, and in a few minutes the structure of my fingers, the muscles, the small thin fine bones will be enmeshed, entangled, so much fallen gelatin spread over and down between the black lettered keys of this typewriter, the flesh of me will slide like a decayed, diseased cloak from my skeleton, but I must write on and on and on until etaoin shrdlucmfwyp cmfwyp . . . cmfwaaaaa ddddddddddddddddddd. . . .





The Shining Land

BRIAN CULLAN had flown the big army amphibian plane almost halfway back across the North Atlantic to America, when he saw the sign in the sky.

Every mile that had slipped behind them had lessened a little the war-weariness that had sagged Cullan's lean shoulders and put premature lines of age in his dark, worn young face. The war was over, and they were going home, and he felt dull, tired relief.

An odd darkness was gathering in the sunlit sky around them, an increasing obscurity as of coming storm. Cullan and his co-pilot, squat, merry Jeff Lewis, had been watching it. Then suddenly, lightning flared through the obscurity—lightning that for a moment seemed to take the form of a flaming, spinning circle.

"Lugh's wheel!" exclaimed Cullan, an uncanny thrill jerking him bolt upright in his seat. "The sign of Tir Sorcha!"

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Lewis.

Cullan saw that freak of curving lightning vanish as he spoke. The queer thrill of eeriness left him.

He smiled a little shamefacedly. "An old Celtic superstition. My people came originally from Ulster, you know. I still

There is a strange, unseeable Elysium that exists out in the western sea, home of a great pre-human race!

By ***EDMOND HAMILTON***

have kinsfolk there, and I was talking to one of them before we left Belfast. She gave me this."

He held out his hand to show the ring he wore. It was a worn, ancient hoop of gold set with a curious prismatic crystal.

Cullan stared at it in sudden surprise. The crystal was glowing. Little flashes of light, tiny spears of radiance, scintillated in it. The tiny rays seemed to form a shining, wheel-shaped sign!

"That's funny—it didn't glow like that

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

before," Cullan murmured, puzzledly. "Maybe electric influence of approaching storm—"

He suddenly remembered what his old kinswoman had told him when she gave him the ring, back there in her little cottage in the low green Ulster hills.

"The ring goes always to the oldest male in our family. And since my other grandnephew was killed in the war, it must be yours. It comes down in our family from Cuchulain himself."

"Cuchulain?" Cullan had smiled at mention of the great hero of Celtic antiquity. "You don't really believe that he was our ancestor, Aunt Maeve?"

"And how could I believe otherwise when the pride of our lineage has been handed down to us these two thousand years?" the old lady had retorted. "Isn't your name Cullan and wasn't the great Cuchulain the Hound of Cullan? Isn't that the very ring that he called the Unlocker, and that Cuchulain brought back with him from the Shining Land?"

Brian Cullan had grinned. "I've flown the Atlantic a good many times during the war, and I never saw any trace of Tir Sorcha."

"And how could you see the Shining Land when it's invisible to the eyes of man?" she had demanded stoutly. "Wasn't Cuchulain himself almost the only man who ever entered it, and didn't even he almost fail to come back from it to his waiting wife?"

Cullan had taken the ring. He knew his great-aunt's seriousness where the old legends were concerned.

He too had learned those stories when he was a child in faraway America—the great tales of the Ultonian cycle, of the heroes of the Red Branch and of the dark warrior among them who had blazed out in battle as Cuchulain, the Celtic Achilles.

His old kinswoman's firm belief made the tales seem almost real. The unquenchable romance and mystery in the Celtic soul gave her firm belief in even that cardinal tenet of Celtic legend—Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land, the strange, unseeable elysium that somehow existed out in the western sea and was home of the great, pre-human race, the Tuatha De.

Cullan was abruptly snatched back from memory by the impact of shrieking winds on the flying plane. Startled, he looked around.

"We've got to get out of this mess quick!" Jeff Lewis yelled.

Cullan stared. "I never saw a storm come up like this!"

The whole sky around them had swiftly deepened in obscurity, and the dark haze was boiling up in terrifying thunderheads

CULLAN tried to swing the plane around But howling winds hurled the ship on like a toy into the lightning-split darkness The left aileron was suddenly crumpled by an inconceivable fist of wind.

"That does it—we're going downstairs now for sure!" cried Lewis.

Cullan's hands fought the controls, trying to keep the plane out of an instant plunge He noticed startledly that the crystal on his finger was now glowing like a tiny, flaming sun.

Abruptly came a wrenching shock. The plane seemed to drop with sickening rapidity as though in a terrific downdraft. Yet for all their sudden nausea, the altimeter registered no change.

Darkness, lightning and howling winds were suddenly gone! They were surrounded by mists that glowed with wonderful, golden radiance, a glowing, unearthly haze.

Cullan, looking out into that golden mist through which the plane was slanting downward, gasped his incredulous amazement.

"Tir Sorcha! The Shining Land!"

"What do you mean?" Lewis demanded impatiently. "What—"

His voice trailed to silence and his broad red face was a frozen mask of incredulity as he looked downward through the window.

The golden mists were thinning as the crippled plane slanted lower. They made out beneath the tawny yellow swell of an ocean far different from the gray-green Atlantic.

There was an island below them! A big, whale-shaped green land, miles long, rimmed by surf-whipped white beaches. And in the misty distance beyond they could glimpse other islands, clustered near and far.

"There's no islands in the North Atlan-

tic!" choked Jeff Lewis. "There just *isn't.*"

"Atlantic? That's not the Atlantic!" flashed Cullan. His black eyes flared with excitement. "It's not our world at all but Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land."

Stunned bewilderment made his co-pilot's voice savage. "Will you stop mouthing silly superstitions and—"

"I tell you, it's the Shining Land just as legend described it!" cried Cullan. "Tir Sorcha, the other world, the world of Lugh and Dagda and Mannanan and all the others of the old gods, the Tuatha De."

His voice raced on with his thoughts. "It must be an interpenetrating world, Jeff! A world congruent with Earth, on a different plane of vibration. The legends always said that Tir Sorcha was locked close to Earth but that neither world was visible or tangible to the other. Yet a few passed from world to world, and somehow we've done it too."

Lewis tried to voice disbelief and could not. The island looming up below was flat rejection of all his arguments.

Brian Cullan's mind was thrilling to wild surmise. He remembered how the crystal of his ring had pulsed with blinding radiance.

"The crystal did it somehow, Jeff! Cuchulain himself is said to have brought it back from the Shining Land, calling it the Unlocker. Somehow, it tuned our plane and us to the vibration of the other world—"

"Forget that and try to get us down without cracking up!" exclaimed the dazed co-pilot."

Instincts fostered by long discipline took over Cullan's mind to the exclusion of all else, as the crippled amphibian sagged toward the running yellow waves. He noted a little boy on the island's shore.

"It's calmer there—I'll try to make the beach."

THE ship struck the water and skimmed forward like a giant surf-board toward the white beach of the whale-shaped island.

It rolled up through the yellow waters onto firm sand. Cullan cut the motors and they scrambled out, stood staring wonderingly.

The island was silent except for the distant boom of surf. The yellow sea, and the golden mists that hid the sun, and the strange scents of alien flowers that freighted the balmy air, held them transfixed.

"God, look at that!" exclaimed Lewis hoarsely, pointing.

Black, monstrous-winged shapes of size incredible were winging up from a distant part of the island. They were dragon-like birds of dimensions enormous, huge as the rocs of Arabian fable.

They flapped away in a direction away from Cullan and Lewis, vast wings shadowing the golden sky, uttering startled, squawking sounds.

"I know now what place this is," husked Cullan. "The Island of Great Birds. Maeldun touched here when *he* voyaged through the Shining Land centuries ago, says the story. And those other islands—"

Those other isles that rose vaguely through the distant golden mists were the isles of the Celtic elysium exactly as legend described them!

The Island of Giant Flowers whose blooms towered higher than tall oaks; the Island of Silver whose beaches and rocks glittered as if of solid metal; the Island of Fire that blazed a red beacon through the golden mists; Cullan dazedly named them from legend as he stared.

"How are we going to get back—to Earth?" Jeff Lewis demanded, his broad face still wearing a stunned look.

"Others—a few—entered this world in the far past and yet got back," muttered Cullan. "Cuchulain, and Maeldun, and—"

"Cullan, look what's coming!" yelled Lewis, pointing suddenly to their right.

Long, slim boats of burnished metal were racing toward them at great speed, oarless and sailless vessels that came obliquely across the yellow sea toward the beach on which they stood.

Cullan glimpsed the crews of the high prowed metal boats as they hit the beach and tumbled ashore with a fierce, high yell. They were tall, fair-haired men in silver mail and helmets, carrying swords that were like brands of living flame as they charged toward the airmen.

"Back into the plane!" Lewis was yelling hoarsely, tugging at his arm. "We can taxi it out of here—"

Brian Cullan remained frozen for a fatal minute of delay, transfixed by the appear-

ance of those towering silver-armored warriors.

"The Tuatha De!" he whispered. "The great race of the old gods who ruled Earth once—"

"Wake up!" yelled Lewis, his face livid. "They've cut us off now!"

The warriors were between them and the beached amphibian. They were rushing toward the two pilots with obvious murderous intent, brandishing those weird flaming swords and yelling fiercely as they came.

CULLAN partly recognized the language in which they shouted! It was a language closely akin to the ancient Gaelic of the Celts, that Gaelic which he had learned from his race-proud father as a child.

Desperately, Cullan threw up his hand and shouted to the charging warriors in Gaelic. "Wait! We are friends, not enemies!"

The warriors stopped, seemingly amazed. "These men speak the tongue of us Tuatha!" exclaimed one.

"Nevertheless, they are outworlders," rang a clear, commanding voice. "They have broken the law, have somehow opened the Portal and entered Tir Sorcha. You know the penalty. Kill!"

"The Princess Fand has spoken—kill!" roared a captain.

Cullan's eyes flashed to the source of the order. It was a woman, slim in silver armor and helmet, a sheathed sword at her belt.

Fand! He knew that name! Princess of Tir Sorcha, wife of Mannanan—fairest of the Tuatha De, the oldd tales had said.

A white, lovely face, merciless in every chiseled feature, met his gaze. Sea-green eyes under straight dark brows flared at him and then suddenly those eyes widened, stared wildly at Cullan.

"Wait!" cried Fand. "Do *not* kill! Oh, fool—blind fool! It is he!"

They stood on the white beach, incredible group of dazed two airmen and puzzled ominously Tuatha warriors, all looking at her.

Fand's green eyes were dark with sudden wild tears, and her gaze had not left Brian Cullan's dark, haggard face. She ran forward, swiftly as a sea-bird.

Her bare white arms flashed around his neck. Cullan, incredulous, felt her sobbing on his chest.

"Cuchulain!" she cried. "Cuchulain!"

II

BRIAN CULLAN, his pulses thudding, found his arms around her. Dazed as he was, a wild thrill shot through him. Beneath the flexible tunic of silver chain-mail, her body was pliant and yielding. Stray strands of dark, perfumed hair brushed his face.

No elfin queen of faery legend this—but a girl, a woman, warm and living. Blood hammered in his temples as she turned her eager eyes up to him.

"I—I am not Cuchulain," he said stammeringly, in the Gaelic. "Cuchulain died two thousand years ago."

Fand's white face was stricken by a swift, terrible hopelessness as she scanned his face.

"Two thousand years?" she whispered. "Of course—I forgot, for the moment when I first saw you, that time is different on Earth."

Cullan felt a shock of discovery. This was the explanation, then, of the Shining Land—an interpenetrating world whose time even was at a different pace than Earth's?

If that were so, it explained why everything here in Tir Sorcha was still exactly as described by the few men of Earth who centuries ago had claimed to have visited here. Centuries had passed on Earth, but it had been a vastly shorter period in the time of *this* world.

Fand had stepped back a little, but her wide green eyes still searched his face. "But you are Cuchulain, in every feature!" she gasped. "And you wear the crystal that I gave him when he left here six of our years ago—the Unlocker that would enable him to return through the Portal. Where got you that?"

Cullan looked at the ring upon his finger. "It came down in my family for a hundred generations. It was supposed to come from our remote ancestor—Cuchulain."

"Then you are of his blood?" cried Fand. "I should have known it. For you are the mold of him as he was."

They were interrupted. The tall Tuatha

captain had stepped forward, and now spoke with impatient fierceness.

"Shall we not kill them now, Princess?" he asked.

Little storm lightnings flared in Fand's sea-green eyes as she turned on the man. "No! These two do not die."

The Tuatha warriors looked shocked. "But the Law says that none of Earth may enter this world and live. And when the Portal opened so strangely but now, did you not summon us to follow you and slay whoever might have entered it from the outworld?"

"Will you argue my order?" flamed Fand. "I command the Portal, do I not?"

"Under Lugh and the other lords, you do," grumbled the captain. "But if Mannanan hears of this—"

She silenced them with an imperious gesture of her hand. "No more! We take them to Ethne with us."

She motioned toward the metal boats. Lewis, interpreting her gesture, looked anxiously at Cullan. "We can't leave the plane!"

Fand understood his objection when Cullan translated. "You wish to take that clumsy craft of yours along? Well, then you can follow our boats."

She gave brief orders to her Tuatha warriors. They followed her back toward the slim metal craft, while Cullan and Lewis reentered the amphibian.

The metal boats skimmed rapidly away across the yellow sea. Cullan started the motors and kept their plane taxiing over the smooth swells after them. But the plane could hardly keep up to the slim, speeding craft ahead.

He saw no sign of propulsion machinery in the boats except a square box at the stern of each, and a continuous flash of white fire or force that jetted back underwater. Startled, he realized that that and the queer force-flaming swords he had seen indicated a mastery of energies unknown to Earth science.

Jeff Lewis was pouring a torrent of questions on him. "Who is she? Why did she seem to know you? Cullan, what in the devil's name does it all mean?"

Cullan strove to order his own seething thoughts. "We've come into an interpenetrating world that men have entered before, though long ago. Cuchulain, my ancestor, was one of them. He was here—two thousand years ago by our time, six years ago by the time of this world!

"For time runs far more slowly in this world. A day here is a year in our own Earth. As to the girl, she is Fand, wife of Mannanan, one of the lords of the Tuatha De. She knew Cuchulain when he was here, it seems, and gave him this crystal so he could return. And I must look like him, for she thought for a moment that I was he."

Jeff Lewis whistled. "She must have known your ancestor pretty well, judging from the reception she gave you."

THE co-pilot reasoned feverishly. "We've got to get back to our own world, and maybe she can help. If she could fix it for your ancestor Cuchulain to come and go, she can do it for us. Maybe that crystal would work both ways?"

Cullan did not answer. He didn't want to think of returning to Earth, in this moment. His blood was tingling with a heady excitement as they raced on over the yellow sea beneath the golden mists, past the dim green islands.

This was the Elysium of his race, found real and tangible by a freak of fate. Straight out of war-worn old Earth he had been plunged into the wonder and loveliness of Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land. He almost felt that he had been here before, as he drank in the haunting beauty of the weird land. But that, he knew, must be because legend had made him familiar with it for so long.

A bigger island was taking shape in the mists ahead. They could see it only dimly at first, for the sun was invisible above the radiant haze. Then they cried out in astonishment as they saw more clearly the island of Ethne, their goal.

The isle was not really large, a green hillock in the sea with a deep bay in its nearer coast. Around this bay clustered the shimmering structures of a city. But greatest wonder of Ethne was the gigantic geyser of water that sprang into the air from some pit or blow-hole on its farther shore.

That colossal waterspout sprang obliquely

across the whole island, like the solid jet of a stupendous hose—a glittering, solid rainbow of water that arched across the isle and fell into the sea just outside the harbor of the city.

"The Island of the Waterspout!" Cullan whispered raptly. "Maeldun was here, long ago—and Cuchulain—"

The boats ahead was racing straight toward the harbor. The plane taxiing after them, breasted big waves that came from the point where the gigantic jet fell into the sea.

Like a Niagara falling from high heaven was that incredible jet! The thunder of it was deafening as they struggled past it, and the spray it flung high into the golden mist painted the air around it with dazzling, changing rainbows.

Then they were past it, following the boats into the harbor. Before them lay ancient docks of yellow stone, fringed with a row of large and small metal craft. Beyond rose the city Ethne.

The golden mists were darkening, as though the sun above the haze was now setting. In the darkening mist, Ethne stood out like the faery city that legend had made it.

Brian Cullan's eyes climbed its structures —shimmering spherical buildings massed like congeries of iridescent soap-bubbles. City unreal as a dream and as beautiful—elfin city built beneath the titar arch of that eternal rainbow of water across the sky!

Fand's warriors pulled the amphibian up onto a worn stone ramp. The Tuathan princess met them when they emerged from the plane.

"You go with me to my palace," she said. And then, noting Jeff Lewis' dazed face, "And fear nothing."

Ethne's streets were darkening, and lights were shining inside the semi-translucent spheres of the soap-bubble buildings. Tall Tuatha lords and ladies in silk and silver stared incredulously at Cullan and Lewis as they climbed the winding yellow streets behind Fand's guards.

Perfume freighted the air from gorgeous gardens that laced the city. There were many slaves or servants here, a race other than the Tuatha De, dark-faced and stocky.

Fand's palace loomed before them against the darkening haze, a piled, fragile-seeming mass of solid bubbles standing on the highest ground of the city amid the foliage of gardens. They followed her into a wonderful, pure-white hall that was like the interior of a pearl.

Fand stopped suddenly. Facing them was a Tuatha lord, a tall, fair, handsome young man. His gray eyes slitted as he stared at them.

"Then the warrior who came ahead of you to me told truth, Fand," he rasped. "You *have* spared two outworlders who came into Tir Sorcha."

He uttered an oath as his eyes lit on Cullen's face. "Now I understand! That outworld dog Cuchulain whom you loved —come back again!"

His hand went to the hilt of his sword. Fand's voice lashed like a whip of silver.

"You forget, Mannanan, that two thousand outer years have passed since Cuchulain went from here."

Her husband glared. "That is true. But why then did you spare this one who so closely resembles Cuchulain? They must be slain at once."

"*I* am keeper of the Portal, not you!" she flared. "The outworlders do not die."

"The Law—," began Mannanan.

"Do you cite the Law to me?" retorted Fand scornfully. "You who these many years have desired to break it, who have wished me to open the Portal to the outworld for your own evil schemes?"

Mannanan hissed, "If I tell Lugh and the other lords of your transgression, you'll not long be keeper of the Portal."

"Tell them," Fand answered serenely, "and I'll tell them of the plans you've long hatched to invade the outworld."

III

MANNANAN'S handsome face became deadly. He turned on his heel, strode out of the pearl-hall followed by a few Tuatha captains.

Cullan looked after him worriedly. "If our coming has made trouble between you and your husband—"

Fand laughed mirthlessly. "Mannanan has been my husband in but name, since Cuchulain came here six years—two thousand years!—ago."

Her vibrant green eyes softened on his face. "Go now and rest, and fear nothing from Mannanan. Soon I will talk further with you."

Dark-faced servants escorted Cullan and Lewis up a coiling, narrow stair that climbed from the rear of the pearl-hall to the upper levels of the bubble palace. They were taken into an azure chamber that seemed hollowed out of sapphire.

Windows in the curving, translucent blue wall gave outlook on the darkening gardens below the palace, on the bubble-domes of Ethne and the harbor. The golden mists had changed to silver, the hazy sunlight now replaced by the light of hidden moons above the mist. The stupendous arc of the waterspouts was like a silver sword across the sky.

"I *think* there's something to drink in this thing, and I hope to God it's strong," muttered Lewis, picking up a silver flagon. He poured and tasted a yellow liquid. "It is—and I need it!"

Then he came over and grasped Cullan's arm. "Cullan, stop staring out that window and come to life! What are we going to do!"

Brian Cullan turned reluctantly from his rapt, bemused contemplation of the otherworldly scene. "Do about what?"

"About getting out of this world and back to Earth!" Lewis exclaimed. "What were Fand and her hard-eyed boyfriend arguing about?"

Cullan related the conversation. And Jeff Lewis' broad face grew worried.

"Then there's danger here, not only for us, but for Earth. If Mannanan and his crowd are planning to go through into our world—"

He paced restlessly to and fro. "These people have powers. Those boats and shining swords imply control of atomic energy. The very fact that they can open a Portal between two interpenetrating worlds argues great science and power."

His face hardened. "We've just spent years of toil and blood to whip Earth back into decent shape. And if there's an invasion now from outside—"

Cullan spoke slowly. "Even if Mannanan and his followers represent a menace, they can't enter Earth while Fand guards the Portal. It was apparent that she has long refused to open it for him."

"But she could open it for *us*," Lewis said eagerly. "We could get back, then." He continued urgently. "You can get her to do it, Cullan. I saw the way she looked at you. Earth or Tir Sorcha—a woman's still a woman."

Brian Cullen was troubled. "I'm not so sure that I'd want to leave here and go back to Earth."

"Not to carry a warning of possible danger?" Lewis prodded. "Not even for that?"

Cullan felt a chill. Lewis was right. The danger to Earth might be vague, potential —but it was real.

A servant interrupted his thoughts. "You are to dine with the Princess," he told Cullan deferentially. "I will conduct you."

"Cullan, now's your chance!" Lewis said when he understood the invitation. "Induce her by any means to let us go back!"

Cullan nodded silently. But as he followed the servant down the curving corridors and the coiling stair of the softly lit palace, he felt a strong inner unwillingness.

LEAVE this? Leave the wonder and beauty of Tir Sorcha to go back to war-exhausted Earth? Leave—Fand?

"None of that," he told himself roughly. "You're nothing to her—just someone who reminds her of Cuchulain. And she's not quite human—"

Not human? When he stepped out onto the silver-lit terrace where Fand awaited him, he had to concede that in her long, star-embroidered white gown, her elfin beauty was more than human.

"We shall dine here," she said. "I wish to talk more with you of Cuchulain."

He looked around. She interpreted his glance. "Mannanan is not here. He sulks with his captains in his own palace."

Black and silver dreamed the gardens below them, in the diffused mists of moonlights. Lights softly starred the bubble domes of Ethne, and gliding lights crossed the harbor.

From the great scimitar of the waterspout, shining across the sky overhead, came a steady whispering that could be heard even above the low, distant thunder where the cataract plunged into the sea.

Fand, slim fingers around a wine-glass, looked out over the supernally beautiful scene. "Your ancestor Cuchulain sat here thus with me the night before he left Tir Sorcha, only six years ago."

"Why did he ever go?" Cullan could not help wondering aloud.

"He said that loyalty to his king, Conor mac Nessa, demanded that he return to Earth until the wars of his people were won. Then, he said, he would come back to Tir Sorcha and to me. But he did not come back."

"He was killed fighting the foes of his king," Cullan told her. "He died, terrible in battle, tying himself upright to a tall stone so that he could strike still one more blow as he died."

Fand's green eyes flashed. "Aye, that would be the way that Cuchulain would die!"

She asked, a moment later, "What of the wife he told me of, the Earth girl Emer who had been mother of his son?"

"Legend has it that Cuchulain never loved Emer in the same way after his return from Tir Sorcha," admitted Cullan.

"It would be so," Fand said broodingly. "He would remember me, as I remembered him and kept hoping for his return even though hope died when I realized the centuries that had passed in your other world.

"Nor could I go into Earth after him," she continued somberly. "Long ago, my people the Tuatha De first went from our world into yours through the Portal my ancestors had learned to open. They first peopled your Earth! But their subjects there in time revolted against their wise rulers and so—it seems but a few score years to us!—Lugh, greatest of the Tuatha, and Dagda, and the other great ones came back into Tir Sorcha and decreed that no one should ever pass through the Portal again.

"Yet Cuchulain and a few others of Earth took advantage of chance openings of the Portal to come into this world. Cuchulain won my love, and Mannanan's hate, and then left promising to return. And when he did not return, I could not transgress my duty as keeper of the Portal to go after him. I could only wait and hope that somehow he would return. And now he *has* returned!"

Cullan was startled. He stood up, and Fand too had risen and was swaying toward him. Her eyes burned him, her face breathless.

He was only human. He found his arms around her, his lips against the intoxicating perfume of her mouth. Then he stumbled back.

"Not me," he said thickly. "Not me you love, but Cuchulain that's dead two thousand years."

Fand's small white hands clutched his shoulders almost fiercely. "You *are* Cuchulain! Time has worked its cycle in the outworld, and you are the Hound reborn again, and come back again to me."

Crazy, impossible delusion of a brooding woman? Be it what it might, the fierce kisses of Fand were sweet!

"Tell me, have *you* an Emer waiting for you in the outworld?" she whispered, white arms still around his neck.

Cullan thought of the girl in America who had given him a half-promise, but she was faraway and unreal now as a dream.

"I'll not be loved for my chance resemblance to a long-dead man!" he said violently. "I'm not Cuchulain, I'm Brian Cullan, and—"

A servant came plunging out onto the terrace and Fand turned angrily at the interruption.

The man's swarthy face was livid. He cried, "Mannanan and his captains attack—"

Death-shriek rang eerily from inside the dreaming bubble-palace at the same moment. Wolf-fierce yells of shouting men and the rushing of feet and clashing of swords exploded in the silver silence.

Fand whirled, her face a white flame of wrath. "He dares! For years, Mannanan and his plotters have coveted the Portal to the outworld, and now he dares attack openly—"

She grasped Cullan's wrist. "This way, and quickly! They must not reach the chamber of the Portal!"

The whole palace, all of Ethne, was now a hideous clamor as Mannanan's armored soldiers poured through the silver-lit gardens in swift onrush.

Cullan raced with the Tuathan princess, around the base of the palace and into it by another door. They entered the back of the shining pearl-hall.

Cullan glimpsed Mannanan and his men pouring in against Fand's guards. Swords were flashing—swords that flamed with charges of destroying force. The merest touch of those swords sent men falling in dead, blasted heaps!

"Retreat up the stair!" Fand's voice cried to her guards like a silver trumpet. "Guard the chamber of the Portal!"

There was a mad, scrambling confusion across the cool loveliness of the shining hall, as the outnumbered soldiers of Fand gave back toward the stair.

Cullan reached and snatched up a sword from a dead man's hand. The weapon was light as a rapier, its blade shining with that deadly force.

"Kill that outworlder!" roared Mannanan's voice through the fight. "Seize Fand!"

A sword struck like a lightning-bolt toward Cullan as he swung Fand behind him to the stair.

CULLAN parried and struck with the half-forgotten skill of fencing taught him at his university five years before. His blade slithered past the opposing rapier and touched his Tuathan enemy's arm.

The man dropped without a groan, his whole side blasted and withered by the destroying touch of the charged sword.

"Up the stair!" Fand cried. "Mannanan has suborned my soldiers—we have only this palace guard."

There began a crazy retreat up the coiling stairway, past level after level of the palace. Fand's few guards were holding the steps stubbornly, barring the narrow way to Mannanan's hordes.

"The Tuatha possess other and more powerful weapons than these swords, but Mannanan dares not use them lest he destroy the palace and the Portal with it," Fand was crying to Cullan. "If we can hold them—"

Jeff Lewis' wild face thrust between them. "Cullan, what is it? What's happening?"

"Mannanan and his bunch are trying to seize the controls of the Portal, whatever it is," Cullan rasped.

"My God!" exclaimed Lewis. "If that happens—"

Cullan heard no more, for one of Fand's soldiers had fallen directly below him on the stair. He leaped in to fill the gap.

Deadly, shining blades clicked and clashed on each other all across the stair. Men touched by them fell as though struck by lightning. Cullan felt old fencing skill coming back to him in the desperate fight.

But they were being forced back upward despite the blasted corpses with which they had strewed the steps. Up past level above level of the palace, until behind and above the defenders lay the end of the stair.

The stair opened up onto the roof of the topmost bubble-dome of the palace! Sunken in that roof was a round recess open to the misty moonlight, a windy, lofty enclosure containing a great mechanism which flashed and glittered.

The thing was a giant crystal similar in shape to the tiny crystal in Cullan's ring. But this one was huge, mounted in massive framework and gimbals of gold, and surrounded by an intricate pattern of similarly mounted smaller crystals.

Fand cried wildly to Cullan, as Mannanan's triumph-shouting hordes pressed them back at the narrow entrance of this chamber of the Portal.

"The Portal is lost unless I call for help! But the only ones whom I can call to aid will deal death to *you!*"

"Do anything, to save the Portal from that devil!" husked Brian Cullan.

Mannanan yelled fiercely from back in the press of the attackers. "Slay that outworlder, quickly!"

Cullan stabbed and struck. The light, deadly sword was almost exactly like the rapiers he had once used in fencing. And the supernal necessity of holding the attackers nerved him.

He parried thrusts of blades whose touch was destruction, and loosed destruction himself by the swift flash and dip and stab of his shining weapon. Blasted bodies now choked the narrow doorway.

Yet another of Fand's guards went down, and now only three of them were left to fight beside him, with Lewis standing ready behind him to replace the next who fell. He caught a glimpse of Fand, standing by the edge of the great crystal machine with her white arms raised toward the night, her face strange and masklike in the silver light.

Another of the men beside Cullan went down. Triumphant roar of voices broke

from the attackers as they surged forward for a last onrush. They would break through, this time—

Something clicked in Brian Cullan's brain. Something made the sword in his hand suddenly flash with a swiftness and skill of which *he* had never been capable.

And as though from remote distances he heard his own voice roaring battle-challenge to the attackers before him. That terrible battle-cry rose raving above the din of the fight.

"Who comes against me?" Cullan heard his own voice roaring. "Who comes to kill the Hound of Cullan, the champion of the Red Branch, the slayer of Ferdia and the Calatin Clan? Who comes against *Cuchulain?*"

For he *was* Cuchulain now, as he fought. Except for one corner of his brain that watched wonderingly, he was another man —a man berserk with battle, a man who took fierce delight in slaying.

"I am Cuchulain the Hound and I've killed Tuatha before! Come meet me, Mannanan!"

NEVER later would Cullan be able to decide whether ancestral personality had come out of the dim chambers of memory to dominate his body, or whether it was merely knowledge of the old legends that obsessed his mind in this supreme moment.

Red battle-madness was rocking his brain and he never could remember more than a glittering net of swords weaving death around him but not quite touching him, as he held Mannanan's warriors back. And then, suddenly, the warriors before him recoiled, staring wildly past him.

"The sign!" yelled a hoarse voice among his attackers. "The sign of Lugh!"

The crimson mists cleared somehow from Cullan's brain. He glanced and saw that around and above the whole palace a wheel of *silent* lightnings were playing. A wheel of fire, sign of Lugh, greatest of the Tuatha De.

The wheel narrowed, and bolts darted from it toward the roofless chamber of the Portal. And in that blaze of silent lightning suddenly stood men, tall, grave, unhumanly calm.

Men? No men could have appeared thus magically. Cullan's twentieth-century knowledge told him that he was seeing merely images projected from a distance in answer to Fand's telepathic call for help.

But dread images, these! Lugh, tall, grave, solemn, his somber, wrinkled face and his form wreathed with silent little lightnings, and giant, terrible-eyed Dagda, and a half-dozen others—gods of the old Celts, lords of the Tuatha De, the science-kings of two worlds once.

Lugh—or the projected image of Lugh —spoke in deep voice to the frozen attackers. "What evil is it ye do here, following Mannanan in lust for conquest of the outworld? Know ye not that such has been forbidden since I ordered closed the way between the worlds?"

Lightnings from the flaming wheel around the palace flashed threateningly toward the warrior hordes in the palace and gardens.

"Flee—Lugh's vengeance strikes!" went up the mad cry, and Mannanan's warriors turned frantically in flight.

But Mannanan darted forward, handsome face blind-mad with hate, his shining sword stabbing at Brian Cullan.

"At least *you* will perish, outworlder!"

Cullan turned—too late to parry that deadly blade. But a sword stabbed past him and ripped into Mannanan's throat. The Tuathan lord fell, face blackening and blasted.

Cullan whirled. Fand, shuddering, dropped the sword. "He would have slain you, Cuchulain!" she choked.

"Too much of slaying has there been because of these outworlders whom your faithlessness let enter Tir Sorcha!" rang Lugh's stern voice to her. "The men must die, before they cause more evil."

Fand swung herself in front of Cullan. "No!" she cried. "If you kill them, you must kill me also! Or I will shatter the Portal you gave me to guard, and open the way once more!"

A STIR went through the Tuathan lords. Astonishment and anger rang in Lugh's voice. "Are you mad, Fand? The men are outworlders and they cannot stay here."

"Then let them go back through the Portal to their own world!" she pleaded desperately.

Lugh frowned. "It is not well for the outworld to learn of Tir Sorcha from them."

"They would not be believed if they told," she insisted. "Two thousands outworld years have passed since we Tuatha De left Earth, and all is but myth and legend now."

Lugh finally made a sign of assent. "So be it, then. But they must go at once, Fand. Open the Portal and send them forth."

Fand turned. Wide, brilliant green eyes looked up into Cullan's face as for a moment she clung to him.

"Cuchulain—twice found, twice lost," she whispered. "You must go. It is that, or death."

"I'll come back," he said hoarsely. "Someday, somehow, I'll find a way back in spite of all their Laws."

"Let the outworlders go, Fand," rolled Lugh's command, stern and urgent.

She thrust Cullan from her, with shaking hands. "Go quickly to your flying boat. When the Portal opens, the crystal on your finger will take you through."

She turned and blindly touched a control-stud by the side of the great machine. The giant crystal began slowly to turn in its gimbals, and the smaller stones around it turned also, faster and faster.

It was Lewis who urged the dazed, agonized Cullan down the death-littered stair of the palace, by main force.

"We've got to get to the plane quickly! Our only chance to get back!"

Palace and streets of Ethne were deserted as death, as the people cowered in fear from the flaming sign of Lugh over the palace.

The amphibian was still drawn up at the edge of the stone ramp. As they scrambled inside it, the ring upon Cullan's finger had begun once more to glow like a tiny, spinning sun.

Abruptly, everything dissolved in swirling mist. They felt a shattering shock. Then the plane rocked wildly, battered by big waves.

Sunlight—normal yellow afternoon sunlight streamed upon them through the cabin windows. The amphibian was floating in the gray-green Atlantic beneath blue sky. They had come back through the Portal to Earth.

Cullan looked about them, dazedly. "Tir Sorcha—and Fand—here a moment ago! Here, right beside us!"

Shining Land, lost elysium, moon-misted Ethne and princess of the old gods, gone, gone—

"Months must have passed in the half-day we were in there!" Lewis was exclaiming excitedly. "We'll have to tell people that we've been floating all that time. They'd never believe the truth."

His eyes gripped Cullan's. "*Was* it true, Cullan? I'm beginning to doubt already that it was only a dream!"

Cullan looked down at the crystal on his finger, Fand's gift to Cuchulain of old and to him. Tears blurred his eyes.

"It was no dream. Someday, even if it means death, I'm going to find my way back to her."

The Legend of 228

By HAROLD LAWLOR

THERE was someone living on the fourth floor of the frame dwelling place at 228 South Railroad Avenue. The first three floors were vacant, and so, presumably, was the fourth. But there was someone, or *something*—

The Valley, whispering, thought it was *something*. Something not human.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

You keep thinking there's someone, something, up there under the roof listening, making plans

For quite a while now the gaunt gray structure in its scabrous paint had been a place to be avoided. Lights were to be seen flickering from its upper story, and strange guttural mutterings were said to issue from it. But no one investigated. The Valley believed in letting well enough—or ill enough—alone.

You probably don't know the "Valley"—even if you live here. It isn't really a valley at all. Roughly one-half mile in length, it's a two-block-wide depression between elevated railroad embankments at either side. Hence the name. Ironically.

Its inhabitants—middle-Europeans for the most part, originally—have so kept to themselves and inter-married as to be almost a race apart. The City itself pays no attention to the Valley at its heart, isolated as it is by the embankments at either side, by railroad yards to the north, and Lake Wasco to the south, foul with the outpourings of the factories lining its shore.

Perhaps the City has forgotten it.

Vida Beck hated the Valley from the first, and everybody in it. And her hatred was cordially returned. She was that cooch dancer from a traveling street carnival whom Sam Beck had married. Or perhaps Vida had married him. They wouldn't put it past her. Married him for his pink shirts which were silk, and for the huge diamond that glittered on the little finger of his hairy left hand.

He was a good man, Sam Beck. Thrifty, and prosperous for the district. He ran the local grocery store and did some banking on the side. The Valley trusted him. But that wife of his! With her rope-colored hair, and her bad eyes, and her sultry mouth, like a wine-red wound in her white face. That Vida!

The women made tongue-and-teeth sounds. And muttered among themselves.

The men said nothing. They only stared, wet-lipped.

IT WAS from Sam that Vida first heard the story of the dog and the terrible tenant in 228.

He was sitting at the kitchen table in his undershirt, sucking up coffee noisily from the thick white cup.

"They was on the other side of the street, these kids," he said, "when they seen the dog go in."

Vida slammed the coffee pot down on the greasy stove, wiped her hands down the front of her housecoat, and sank listlessly into the chair opposite Sam. Look at him there. Dribbling and spitting in his excitement. Agh! He made her sick.

She hated him—this greasy, stingy little man she had married. And she thought: If she could only get her hands on his money! It wasn't the first time this thought had occurred to her. But she had to be careful. She had to take it slow. She wouldn't want Sam or the cops coming after her.

"Pretty soon," Sam was spitting, "these kids, they hear this dog snarlin' and growlin' like he's fightin' wit' somep'n. Then he give a kind of yelp, they says—real high, like screamin'."

Vida stirred restlessly. Sometimes she felt it would be better if she just got Sam out of the way altogether, first. If she could do it safely. If she could only meet some guy, not too bright, who'd do it for her.

"Somp'n comes flyin' out the fourt' floor winda, then—all cut and mashed up. All horrible." Sam, shuddering, paused dramatically. He whispered, *"Is the dog!"*

WELL, what did he want her to do, faint? He had too-eager eyes, Sam. Made you want to kick him like you would a cur. Deliberately, to spoil his pleasure, Vida took a long, slow sip of coffee. She raised an eyebrow, lazily.

"So what?" she said.

Sam looked crestfallen, but he explained patiently, "Is someone *livin'* on the fourt' floor there. Or some *Thing*. Something—*awful!*" He stared at her, round-eyed.

Vida sniffed. "Well, why don't somebody go over there, then, and find out who it is? Or what?"

"Is all scared," Sam defended. "All the people in the Valley, they no go near the place. They afraid."

"Dumb slobs," Vida sneered. Her favorite epithet for the Valley dwellers. It was like them to be scared about nothing. Catch her believing such a dopey yarn.

But she remembered the story. And the fear that kept the Valleyites away from 228. It came in handy, later on.

THERE was nothing to do, daytimes, in this lousy place. You could walk up Railroad Avenue and back again. That was all. A hell of a thrill, that was. It served one purpose, though. It annoyed Sam.

"Why you all the time walk up and down, up and down?" he asked plaintively.

Vida stared at his thick lips. "You don't like it, you know what you can do."

And though he wasn't there to see, she always went by the cigar store in low gear. She liked skin-tight, knee-high dresses. And no stockings on her shapely legs. She enjoyed the little stir she created among the male loungers there. They could look, but she made it plain they aroused no interest in return. It pleased her to let her own glance trail indifferently over them, then flick away.

Until the afternoon that Joe Ross was there among them.

That wasn't his real name, of course. His own name was so full of *c*'s and *z*'s and *v*'s that the Valley had been forced in self-defense to shorten it to Ross. He was a no-good, a low-life, a bum. Handsome, though. You had to say that for him. There was something about the insolent stare of his fig-colored eyes that made the girls of the Valley tuck in stray wisps of hair self-consciously when they saw him, and giggle more than usual.

He's been away.

"Where ya been, Joe?" the boys asked.

"Oh, around." He gestured vaguely. "Just bummin' around."

Thrown out of the Army, maybe. If, indeed, he'd ever got in. And now he was back. Now you could see him on the street, talking listlessly to some agitated seventeen-year-old girl. Elena Ostrowski, perhaps. Until an angry female voice would call. "Elena, you come here, like I say! I tell your Pa on you, you be sorry, I betcha!" Humiliated tears in Elena's eyes, then. And Joe—

Sometimes he'd make a rude sound with his lips in the direction of the worried maternal voice. But mostly he just smiled. His eyes didn't smile, though. His eyes were never amused, or even interested.

They say the only time his eyelids lifted above half-mast was the first time he saw Vida Beck.

Their glances caught and held. It was almost as if they exchanged a silent message. She faltered in her insolent step. His hand with the cigarette halted halfway to his lips. The other men there stirred uneasily, vaguely sensing drama. It was like a show, kind of. You kept watching to see what would happen next.

Then Vida's eyelids dropped, and she went on. Joe squashed his cigarette under his shoe, and followed her without a word.

That was the way it began.

SHE couldn't let him come to the flat over the grocery store, for Sam would be sure to see him. But she remembered the lonely house at 228 South Railroad Avenue. She could meet Joe there, afternoons.

He didn't like the suggestion much, when she first made it. *"There?"* he protested half-heartedly. "But lis'en—"

So he'd heard the story already?

She leaned against him. "Don't tell me you're like the rest of the dumb dopes around here. Believing that crazy stuff—"

But she was not displeased at his unwillingness. It seemed to prove that he was just as she had sized him up at first glance. Handsome and vain and stupid. He would be ideal for her purpose. Just give her a little time.

He was crazy about her from the beginning, but he never grew used to the gaunt old house. There were times when he'd take his mouth from hers, and raise his head, and listen. But there was never anything to be heard but silence—a sinister silence, it seemed, as if the house had paused just then to listen too.

"It gets you, kind of," Joe whispered once. "I keep thinking there's someone, or something, up there under the roof. Listening to us. Making plans, maybe. To use later on. To catch us when we're not careful."

Vida didn't like it when he talked like that. His husky hesitant voice, his flickering light eyes— Honest, it was enough to give you the meemies, she thought irritably. But she was careful not to let him see she minded.

They used to meet in the living room of the first floor flat. Someone had left a few pieces of furniture not worth moving away—a rickety chair or two, a table. They always used the back entrance, coming sep-

arately so that no one might see them together. Once there, they were almost certain to be free from interruption. For who would ever come?

But one day someone did.

IT WAS Joe who first heard the footsteps. He was off the daybed like a cat. Going to the scarred oak door giving on the hall, he opened it the merest crack.

Vida saw his face change. He stood there quite a while, motionless, until at last unbearable curiosity drove her to join him.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

"The Prohaska kid. He went upstairs."

"We better keep quiet and watch until he leaves," Vida said. "If he sees us here, he'll spread it all over the neighborhood."

She remembered Sam had said it was Johnny Prohaska's dog that had been thrown that day from the fourth floor window. She supposed the kid had been crazy about the mutt.

And now he had forgotten his fear of the house enough to come back—perhaps with some idea of revenge.

She and Joe could hear nothing, but they waited fifteen minutes or so. Vida wanted to go up and investigate then, but Joe said, "The punk probably went out the back way. Maybe he's out in front by now."

They closed the door finally, and Vida went to the window and drew back the tattered shade far enough to see out. Johnny was nowhere in sight, but there was a little knot of women across the street, clustered about someone that Vida couldn't see. Their voices were low, but from their violent gestures it could almost be guessed that they were attempting to dissuade someone from rash action of some sort.

Joe came to stand behind Vida. He was tall enough to look over her head. "Who is it?"

"Sh!" Vida said.

The knot of women untied, and they saw Johnny Prohaska's mother at its center.

"He go in there to see what hurt his dog. He ain't come out." Mrs. Prohaska looked threateningly about. "I go to get him. Ain't nobody can stop me."

They all grabbed at her, but she broke free and ran straight for the door of 228. No one followed. No one seemed to dare. They just stood there and watched, open-mouthed.

Vida held a finger to her lips as Mrs. Prohaska pounded through the hall, but Joe didn't need the warning. They continued to keep an eye on the women outside, but they listened to the sound of Mrs. Prohaska's feet mounting the stairs. They waited for what would happen next.

There were no screams by way of prelude. But suddenly they heard the heavy fall of Mrs. Prohaska's footsteps racing *down* the uncarpeted wooden stairs of 228. They heard her stumble through the hall, then saw her burst from the door, her hair streaming witchlike behind her, her face working madly.

"Oh, oh, oh!" They could hear her sobbing softly, like the cooing of pigeons from a distant cote. "Oh, oh, oh!"

"What's eating her, anyway?" Joe forgot to whisper.

Vida didn't answer. Puzzled, she watched the wildly gesticulating Mrs. Prohaska. The woman was running about the street now in crazy circles, like a bug tormented by a lighted match held near.

"She's gone crazy," Joe said. "Whatever she saw—"

Two of her friends finally broke free from the paralysis of fear that seemed to hold them, and caught Mrs. Prohaska. She appeared to be sightless. And her lips were uttering only a meaningless gabble. The women who held her stared horrified, then turned aside as though in revulsion.

Mrs. Prohaska, released, stood stupidly for a minute, weaving from side to side. Then she turned and ran, erratically but true, back to the door of 228. The others in the street screamed, but Mrs. Prohaska ran on, almost eagerly, as if to a lovers' meeting.

Again the tenement swallowed her bulky figure. Again Vida and Joe heard her stumble through the hall and up the stairs.

But she didn't come down again. Though they waited for long minutes, she didn't come down again.

There wasn't a sound.

Joe seemed badly shaken, but Vida had an explanation.

"Nuts," she said. "Mrs. Prohaska beat it out the back way, too, after putting on that act. You know what? I bet the Prohaskas

want to buy this dump, and they've started all this talk and stuff to run the price down. You wait and see. They'll be laughing at everybody yet."

Joe didn't appear convinced, but Vida let it go at that. They had to wait a long time before the little crowd of frightened women across the street finally drifted away.

Joe and Vida sneaked out the rear door then, but a block away they looked back at the house. The late afternoon sun shone brilliantly, but the dreary tenement at 228 lay in shadow. Joe pointed this out. Pointed out too, significantly, that there was no other building or anything near to cast the shadow on 228.

As though the darkness emanated from the leaning frame pile itself, like evil mist from a swamp.

Vida only shrugged, annoyed. She supposed she'd have an awful time getting Joe to meet her there after this.

AFTER supper that night, Sam was full of the story of Mrs. Prohaska and her son. He babbled and spat until, Vida thought, he was like to drive her nuts. It wasn't enough that she had seen the thing herself that afternoon. Now she had to *listen* to it, too. God, but she was fed up with Sam. If she didn't think of some way, soon, to get rid of him——!

He finally finished the story at last and waited, bug-eyed, for her comment. She told him the same thing she'd told Joe. The Prohaskas wanted to buy a house, cheap. But for once she couldn't drive Sam into abashed silence.

"Why for the Prohaskas buy a house? They *got* a house," he pointed out with irrefutable logic. "Besides, where are they now? Nobody's seen 'em." He shook his shiny bald head sagely. "Ain't nobody ever gonna live in 228 again. Ain't nobody ever goin' *in* there again. Not, and come out."

He looked up then nervously, obviously afraid to see what effect this brash contradiction might be having on Vida. But, surprisingly, she was smiling and nodding her tawny head in a pleased sort of way.

"That's right, Sam," she said softly. "Nobody who goes in there is ever coming out again. Everybody knows that now. The whole Valley knows it, don't they?"

"Yeah," Sam said, and looked pleased to see that for once Vida agreed with him.

Vida's eyes were shining. It was perfect! And to think that Sam himself had shown her the way!

Sometimes, Vida thought, she had to laugh.

SHE was afraid maybe she'd have a little trouble persuading Joe. But in its way, indirectly, the house at 228 helped her there, too. For Joe met her there again "only just this once." He was afraid of the house. He'd had enough of it. He wanted her to run away with him.

"Why do we hang around here for, anyway?" he asked. He looked around the dirty room, and seemed to cock a listening ear toward the upper floor. "We stay in the Valley, this is the only place we can meet. Let's blow."

Vida veiled her eyes that he might not see the swift exultation there. This was going to be easier than she'd thought.

"You got the money?" she asked, though she knew what his answer would be.

"No."

She looked at him thoughtfully, then. She waited a minute before she said slowly, "Sam has. Sam has a lot."

"Well?"

She moved closer to Joe. "Something could happen to Sam. He could fall, maybe. Or—or hurt his head, real bad."

Joe said nothing. Wasn't he ever going to get it? Did she have to draw a *picture?*

She kept the irritation out of her voice. "Maybe he'd die. Maybe his body would g into one of those empty freight cars on the siding, back of the house. It might be a long time before they found it, you know. The car might be in Arizona by then, or California, or anywheres."

Joe said, "And by that time they wouldn't know where he'd come from. Or even who he was."

Vida's arms slipped around his neck. "That's right."

Joe had an objection. "But, look. The people around here, they're going to wonder where Sam went all of a sudden."

"Oh, no, they ain't." She had all she could do to keep from laughing. This was the best part. This was the joke. "We'll see

to it that someone tells them Sam came here —*but didn't come out.*"

Under her hands she could feel Joe's body begin to shake. He got it. He was laughing, too. Pretty soon he'd think the whole thing was *his* idea. Well, that was okay with her.

She felt his body stiffen.

"But, look," he said. "Why not *let* Sam come here and go upstairs, instead of me—killing him?"

She wanted to scream at him, "Because, stupid, there *isn't* anything up there!" He believed in the horror on the fourth floor, just like the rest of the saps around here. With an effort she kept her voice honeyed. "Wild horses wouldn't drag Sam up there, and you know it. Besides, even if he went up, we wouldn't know—we couldn't be sure he was dead. But if you come over to my place tonight—"

She had her way, for Joe finally snickered. "Okay, I'd like to meet your husband."

"And he'll be *dying* to meet you," Vida said.

That set them laughing again. But presently they stopped, and Joe's parted lips met hers fiercely.

Even while she strained closer to him, Vida thought, "Dumb slob! You dumb slob, you!" Once Sam was out of the way and she had the money, she'd get rid of Joe. She'd be free. She was smart. There wouldn't be anything she couldn't do.

Joe pulled away from her so suddenly that she was afraid he'd guessed her thoughts. But he was only listening, his head bent.

"Sh!" he whispered. "I heard something, just then—*upstairs.*"

Oh, for God's—! She pulled away from him. Annoyed, she caught his hand. "Come on! Let's go up and see what's there and settle this, once and for all."

He would have hung back, but at the ill-concealed contempt in her eyes he went to the hall with her. Together they mounted the stairs. But they only went to the third floor. There, even Vida halted. They heard a soft slurring sound of motion coming from above them. But it wasn't that that drove them down again.

It was the smell. The horrible stench seeping down from the fourth floor.

Joe's forehead went shiny with sweat. Joe's hand on her arm forced her down the stairs again.

"Whew!" she said, once again in the front room on the first floor. "Dead rats?"

Joe kept looking over his shoulder into the hall. He didn't say anything.

She laughed at him, after that. He saw the contempt in her eyes, and he resented it. He tried to laugh, too, and conceal his fear. But she knew he was terrified of the house.

Perhaps she remembered that, later on. Perhaps she even had time to think, when it was too late, "But I'm the one who should have been afraid!"

SAM never knew what hit him.

But it was—pretty terrible. Vida hadn't known how horrible it would sound —the hammer crashing down on that shiny defenseless skull. To make it worse, Joe had gone on wielding the hammer long after it had seemed necessary, long after Vida had whispered thickly past the sickness in her throat, "Stop. Stop, Joe, that's enough!"

Joe's lips were drawn back in a grimace like a dreadful laugh. His eyes were absorbed. It seemed hours before he heard her and that uncomprehending look faded from his queer light eyes. It frightened her, that look. For the first time, Joe seemed other than a stupid tool whom she could maneuver as she wished.

"What's the matter?" Joe asked. "You look scared." Plainly it pleased him. He went on, as if he'd made a discovery, "You thought I'd be scared, like I was in 228. Sure, I was afraid there. I'm afraid of anything I can't see, or understand, or put my hands on. You thought it was funny." He weighed the hammer in his hand. "Why aren't you laughing now, Vida?" His eyes lifted to where she was crouching against the opposite wall.

Her narrow red tongue flicked out to wet her lips. But she couldn't say anything.

Joe laughed strangely. "I'm the boss now," he said.

She straightened at that. The queer look was gone from his eyes. She'd tell him where to head in. "Look here—" she began.

But Joe was absorbed in the diamond on Sam's little finger.

"It don't come off," Vida said sullenly, diverted for the moment. "Sam told me,

more than once. Mrs. Ostrowski knew it, too. She thought it was a good joke on me, because she knew how bad I wanted it."

She brought soap and water with which to attempt easing the ring off. But it meant touching Sam. She shuddered and went about it so gingerly that Joe pushed her aside.

"I'll do it. Get out of my way," he ordered.

But the ring defied his every effort. Vida was all for letting it go, however reluctantly. She was nervous. She wanted Sam's body safely out of the house. And quickly. But Joe said, "I'll get it off, by God, if—"

He slammed down the inner stairway to the grocery store beneath the flat. When he came back, he had Sam's black tin cash box under his arm. In his free hand, he held a meat saw.

Vida's eyes widened and her "Oh *no*, Joe!" was a sigh of horror. Still it had to be done. But did Joe have to look like he was *enjoying* it?

She turned away, trying to close her ears to the hideous sounds the saw was making. When the dreadful noise finally stopped, and she could bring herself to look again, the diamond was winking at her from Joe's hand.

And Joe was smiling at her blandly. A smile that only increased her uneasiness.

SHE had never been so glad before to see the sunrise. In the kitchen of the flat above the grocery store, Vida stood at the window overlooking the railroad siding.

That had been the one danger. That the cars might stay for days on the siding, as they sometimes did. But it was empty now, and the cars, including the one that was serving as Sam's temporary tomb, were gone.

During the night, switch engines had panted, and couplings had locked, as men shouted in hoarse voices. Vida had heard them.

For all she remembered, someone else might have helped Joe spirit Sam's body down the stairs and up the embankment to the dark red freight car. There was only this dull ache in her shoulder from Sam's dead weight to remind her it had been she. There were only the cuts and bruises on the soles of her feet from the gravel that had slipped into her sandals as they struggled up the embankment. She'd never felt the pain until this morning.

Joe came out of the bedroom behind her, and slipped his arms around her. She tried not to let him see how tense she grew under his hands. She was afraid of them, and of him. It would be so easy for those hands to slide around her neck—

She forced herself to turn around and face him. He must have noticed her cringing, for he was smiling in a satisfied way. But his eyes remained cold and mirthless.

"I better beat it out of here while it's still early," he said. "I'll get hold of Elena Ostrowski and tell her to spread it around that she seen Sam going into 228 last night, but she didn't see him come out. She'll do it —for five bucks."

Vida stirred. "One is enough."

"I said five," Joe repeated, too pleasantly. "I've opened Sam's cash box—"

She came to life then, eagerly. "How much was in it?"

"Five thousand."

"Joe, give me—"

"I'm taking care of it. And the ring." He waited a minute, his light eyes daring her to object. "You got any kick to make?"

She wet her lips. "N-no. Well—no."

Joe smiled. "Elena's story will get around today. Tonight we can leave."

She forced herself to slide her arms around his neck, and pressed closer to him. "Joe, let *me* keep the ring and money. You're crazy about me, aren't you, Joe?"

"Sure."

Over his shoulder, where he couldn't see, she smiled. She'd been afraid of him too soon. This was the way to handle Joe.

He pushed her away from him gently, but too quickly for her to erase the smile.

"I'm a fool about you, baby," Joe said easily. "But I'm not a *damn* fool!"

He kissed her once, hard, then he was gone. She paced the flat from front to back. He couldn't get away with this! She'd be damned if she'd let him! Just wait till he came back!

She stopped then in her angry, aimless progress.

Maybe he wasn't coming back!

But he came back all right. He returned late that afternoon with the first wave

of mourners. No matter how little they liked her, the Valley was quick with its sympathy, and sincere.

Vida had been expecting them all day. She was prepared.

"But why would Sam do such a thing?" she asked over and over, careful to look first bewildered, then appropriately stricken. "Why would Sam go in that dreadful place?"

They didn't know. They could only tell her what Elena Ostrowski had said "—and he didn't come out."

"You mean," Vida slowly let it dawn on her," "he's—dead?"

They turned away sadly, not answering. Behind their backs Joe made a long face, mock-tragic. Vida lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, and rocked back and forth, inconsolably.

She was doing fine. She even *felt* like a sorrowing widow, she thought in pleased amazement. She would have convinced them all—if it weren't for the Ostrowski's.

They were there when she looked up at the sudden hush—Big Mike Ostrowski himself, flanked on one side by his wife, on the other by Elena. Elena's wrist was grasped in her father's big hand. She was white. It was that which warned Vida. In the corner behind them, Vida saw Joe's face grow suddenly wary. The other neighbors present fell silent. Big Mike was a leader, of sorts, in the Valley. People listened when he spoke.

His eyes scanned the room. "You there, Joe Ross, why you give my girl five dollars to say she seen Sam go in 228, and not come out, when she didn't see no such a thing?"

There was a gasp from the crowd. Vida fidgeted. From outside, on the rapidly darkening street, she could hear a buzzing as of angry bees. Mike had brought others with him! What did it all mean?

Elena whimpered. "He made me tell, Joe. He caught me hiding the money. I—"

"Shut up, Elena!" her father ordered. He looked at Vida. "We talked it over—the Mrs. and me. We know there was only one reason why Sam would go into 228, when he was so scared of it. You. He was crazy about you." He came and stood over her accusingly. "You sent him a message saying you were a prisoner there, or something, didn't you? So he'd go in. Didn't you?"

Even then, in all the danger and taut suspense that hovered over the room, Vida almost had to laugh. They thought that was how she'd got rid of Sam! If they only knew! But the freight car was gone. They couldn't prove anything. She looked straight in Mike's eyes.

"You're nuts," she said boldly.

She got away with it. They believed her. The silence was broken by a pent-up sigh from many throats. Big Mike shifted uncertainly on his huge feet.

Vida saw Joe shoot her a quick glance of approval for keeping her head. His face was rigidly calm, falsely innocent, but his forehead was shiny with sweat. He put up a hand to wipe away that betraying evidence before it could be noticed.

Mrs. Ostrowski shrilled, "Lookit! Lookit on his hand! Sam's diamond ring, what wouldn't come off his finger!"

Everything happened so fast then. Vida could hardly see. Big Mike yelled, "Grab him!" The crowd surged forward, muttering. Joe caught up a carving knife and held it, point toward them.

"First guy touches me gets this in the belly, I ain't foolin'!"

They stopped. He edged toward the back door.

"It was her idea, anyway." He nodded at Vida.

Vida's hand went to her mouth. "Joe! Joe, don't leave me here alone!"

"Take care of yourself," he snarled. "That's what I'm doin'."

But he had the money! And the ring! She'd be left with nothing!

"Joe!" she wailed.

But he was gone.

THERE is only a gaping black hole now where the four-story flat building once stood at 228 South Railroad Avenue. But the legend about it has never died.

The dreary tenement burned down that night. Big Mike Ostrowski himself set fire to it with one of the glowing torches he'd caught up from someone in the angry mob. But that was later. Much later.

The people of the Valley have their own laws, and exact their own punishments. The City, just over the railroad embankment, is a

million light-years away. Not for the Valley, its uniformed police, its courts, its penal institutions.

No. Vida should go the way Sam had gone. They sentenced her themselves, there in the none-too-clean kitchen of her own flat.

She couldn't believe it at first. Why, the poor fools! They were setting her free! These dumb slobs didn't know it, but they were setting her free! Sure, she'd go in 228. She'd go up to the fourth floor. She'd *shag* through the fourth floor, if they liked! And when she'd come out again unharmed, they'd let her go. They'd have to let her go. They couldn't prove a thing.

And when she caught up with Joe, as she would if it took her years—!

Her mouth straightened vindictively.

She said not a word as the Valley-ites escorted her down Railroad Avenue.

Opposite 228, Big Mike said, "Don't think you can just walk through the second or third flat and out the back way. There'll be men watching in back. And you're to carry this, so we can see you through the windows of the front stair-hall as you go up. We'll know it if you don't go to the top floor."

He held out a stinking, lighted, coal-oil lantern. She took it, her lips curling disdainfully. They didn't put a hand on her, but the force of their hatred, their stern determination seemed to propel her across the street and up onto the outside stoop of the dark building.

She hesitated there, but not from fear. Just before she entered the door, she turned and faced them all defiantly.

"You dumb slobs!" she spat at them. "You dumb slobs, you!"

THEY only stared at her stonily, implacably. No one said a word. Their very silence seemed to whip her on. When she'd gone in they stood there in a body, watching the hall windows at every landing between floors. They saw her pass the first, the second. The gray oblong of the window would lighten as she approached it, lamp in hand. They could see her as she passed. Then the window dimmed and the one above it grew gradually brighter.

She climbed more slowly as she neared the top floor. Perhaps from weariness. Perhaps, they hoped, from fear. The last time they saw her was at the window on the landing between the third and fourth floors.

She stopped there and held the lighted lantern high, so that they might see her clearly. With her free hand, she made an impudent gesture. The crowd sighed, disappointed. So she wasn't afraid then. They could even see her red lips laughing scornfully as she turned away to climb the last flight of stairs.

The window grew gradually dimmer as she mounted. Then the square of light held one tone of yellowish-gray for seconds, as if she'd reached the top floor at last, and stood there waiting.

It was the smell, again, that made her hesitate—the gradually increasing stench. She stood there, wavering. The lantern threw dim light in a golden fan on the living room floor before her. Fragments of decayed food were there, scattered about; and scraps of stuff—bits of clothing, she guessed, from their color and texture.

She shrank from the task before her. But—there was no going back.

At length she advanced, and the wedge-shaped segment of faint light advanced with her. Into the living room stealthily she moved; breathlessly across the floor to the dingy golden oak colonnade leading to the dining room.

And there she stopped. Frozen.

Her spine was whispering to her atavistically. Bidding her turn around. Warning her of the thing that slithered from the black corner behind her—the hairless, furless, featherless monstrosity, its hideous body gleaming like slimy, wet red rubber, its opalescent shallow eyes, glaring, fixed upon her.

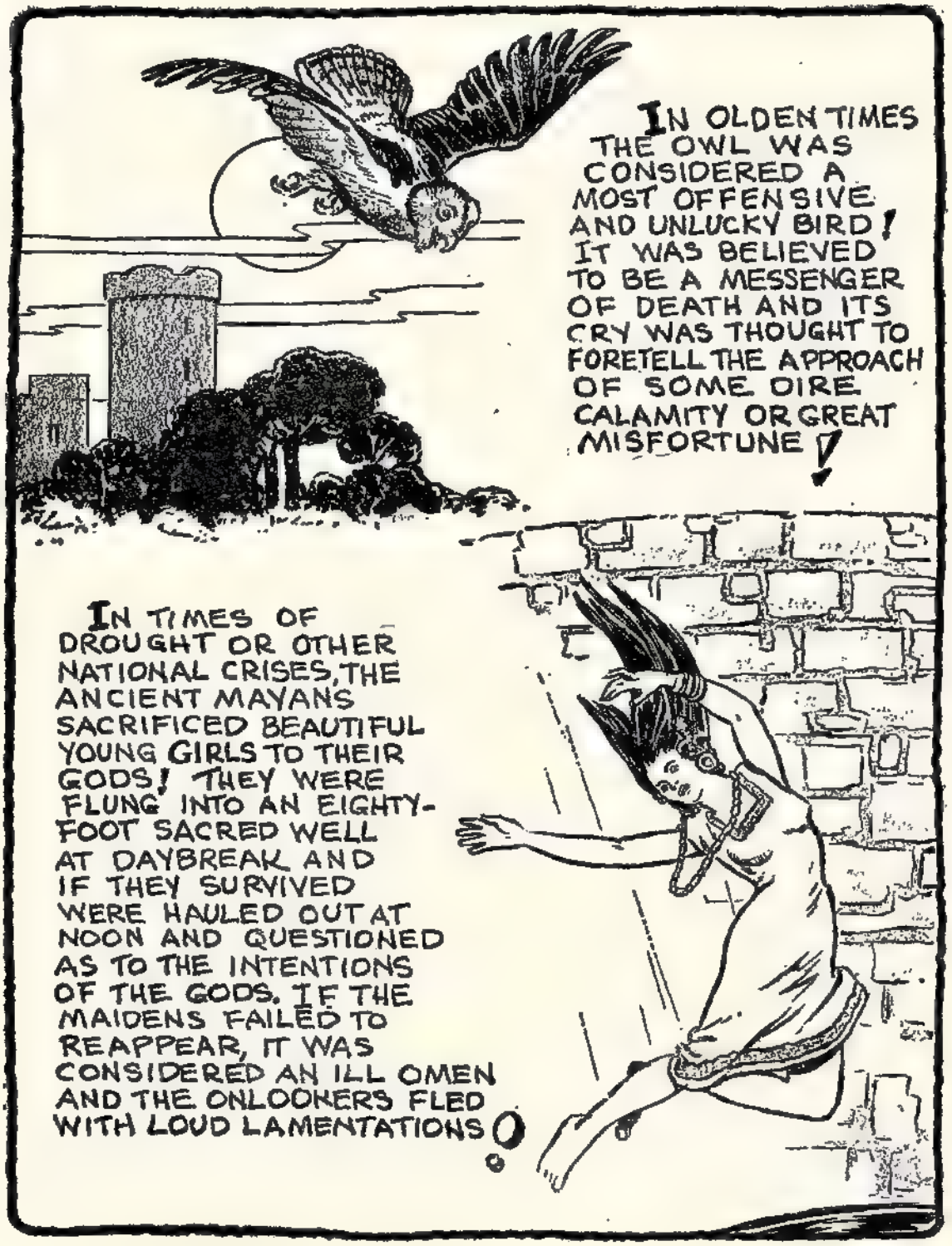
She wheeled. The lantern sent crooked shadows dancing eerily on the walls. Just one vivid glimpse she caught of it—bloated, inhuman, grotesque.

Even the people in the street heard the viscid bubbling, then, of the creature's saliva. And abruptly, as they waited, there was a brittle, spilling crash of sound, and Vida's light went out. . . .

They say her screams were terrible.

Superstitions and Taboos

by Weill



The Lost Day

By AUGUST DERLETH

MR. JASPER CAMBERVEIGH was a methodical gentleman who rose each morning at seven o'clock, regardless of the weather; but that morning, for a reason unaccountable to him, he woke half an hour later.

That was the first disturbing fact.

The second was a curious little occurrence for which, likewise, Camberveigh could not account. When he gazed into his bathroom mirror the face which looked back at him was briefly, not his own. What was

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

He had the logical man's dislike for fantasy and vague fears

most odd about this was the fact that for a few moments he was not *aware* that it was not his own face, despite the plainly seen age of that visage—almost twice his fifty years. Then something happened to him, to the mirror, to his sense of balance; he almost fell; the image in the mirror became misty and its outlines gave place to the more familiar lineaments of his face; and in a few seconds he found himself gazing into his own troubled blue eyes and fingering his own, firm jaw.

Even this disturbing dislocation was not yet the last of the mysterious events of that morning, for, when he went to turn on the radio for the usual B. B. C. newscast, the first thing he heard was this: "Saturday, May seventeenth. British bombers were over enemy territory again last night. . . ."

Saturday, May seventeenth!

Camberveigh's first thought, being a scholarly person and a man of fixed habits, was that the announcer had made a mistake, but as the newscaster's voice droned on, speaking of the events of the preceding Friday, Camberveigh had to admit that it must indeed be Saturday morning.

But what, then, had happened to Friday?

For Camberveigh had gone to bed on Thursday night, and by all the laws of time and space, this should be Friday morning!

He was gravely disturbed. If he had been in any way under the weather on Thursday, he was prepared to admit the spare possibility that he might have slept through Friday. But he had been in exceptionally good spirits and health on Thursday; he had made his customary rounds of the second-hand book stores—oh, yes, there was that old leather-bound book he must return to Max Anima in Soho—and he had gone to bed at his usual hour: eleven o'clock, a bedtime he had observed ever since the death of his wife five years ago. And he felt his usual self this morning, save for that curious experience in the bathroom—and, of course, waking half an hour later than usual. Half an hour! Great heaven, a whole day and a whole night later! And half an hour on top of that!

Camberveigh shaved and had breakfast, preoccupied. If indeed he had slept through Friday, he ought certainly to be hungrier than he was. But he was not hungrier than usual. Moreover, if he had not shaved on Friday, he ought to have had a greater growth of beard. Furthermore, there were curious misplacements of objects in his house which led him to the unavoidable conclusion that he had not slept through Friday. Obviously, then, he had been up and about at something. But search it as he might, his memory told him nothing, his memory presented an absolute blank.

And yet not quite absolute: there was deep within him an urgent conviction that there was something strange and terrible he ought to know.

Camberveigh, however, had an habitual dislike for fantasy, and he refused to entertain vague fears, premonitions, hunches, and the like. Granting the fact that somehow his doings on Friday the sixteenth eluded his memory, he had today to do the things he should have done on Friday. That book Anima had loaned him must be returned to the old book-seller. And he must have a visit with his physician to ascertain whether this sudden lack of memory about the previous day might be a symptom of some serious physiological disorder. A stitch in time, he thought.

ACCORDINGLY, still troubled about his flawed memory, Camberveigh sat down and had a look at the book. Anima had pressed it upon him, saying it was full of antiquities, and, indeed, so it was. He examined the binding and had an unpleasant conviction that it was bound in human skin. The book itself was written in Latin and was quite difficult to read, for the print had faded in many places. It was obviously, however, one of those curious items on demonology and allied occult matters, and he was a little puzzled to know why Anima should have insisted that he take it along, when Anima knew very well his interests lay primarily in the field of entomology and ornithology, both of which were quite distinctly removed from the occult.

He read a passage here and there, translating as he read. "To summon from the Pit Him Who Will Serve you can be done in this wise . . ." here followed an elaborate formula. He turned a few pages. "It is possible at the midnight hour to call up the spirits of the dead and hold com-

munion with them in regard to events of the future. . . ." He turned a few more pages. "Thus it can be that through the medium of the accursed object, it is possible to send forth one's spirit self, the astral body, and dispossess another for a brief time, but only for so long as the object remain in his possession." He dipped into the book farther along. "Quentus had with him continually a large black dog, commonly held to be his familiar, a certain evil demon summoned from the Pitt and put into his service. . . ."

Certainly it was interesting, Camberveigh thought, in a detached way; but it was not in his field, and he must regretfully return it and spend no further time on it. He had little enough time to devote to his studies as it was. He wrapped the book carefully, got dressed, took his umbrella—though it was an exceedingly mild day outside—and set out for his doctor's office, which was within walking distance of his home.

There was nothing whatever wrong with him.

"Perfectly fit," said his physician. "Your experience is certainly odd—but not at all unique. Such things have happened before and will happen again. Forget about it."

"But I have the feeling that there is something about yesterday I ought to know."

"So would I, in the circumstances."

Somewhat reassured, Camberveigh went on his way. He descended to the Underground, and, while waiting for his train, bought a copy of the *News of the World*. British bombings, threats of German reprisals, Spanish toadying to the Axis, American toadying to Spain—disgusting! He turned to an inner page and saw that one of his acquaintances had come to his end in a violent manner. "Murder of Rochard Craig!" read the headline. "No further clue has thus far been discovered in the search for the murderer who entered Rochard Craig's home sometime yesterday and killed Craig when discovered in the act of rifling Craig's bookshelves of rare old volumes which constituted the heart of the Craig collection. Craig was stabbed to death. Search is being made for the missing volumes but there is little hope. . . ." Horrible! thought Camberveigh perfunctorily, and went on to read the usual column on birds in the country written by a retired beekeeper in Sussex.

His train came and he took it to Soho, taking pleasure in the accounting of what the linnets and the cuckoos and a rare peregrine had been up to during the past week in Sussex. He caught the correspondent in what he was convinced was a minor error, and made a mental reservation to write and challenge him on the point, however trivial it was. The scientific amenities must be observed, fancy must not be confused with fact, the truth must be adhered to with exactitude. That alone was the proper attitude.

HE ARRIVED at Anima's hole-in-a-corner book shop some time after the lunch hour, but, since he was habitually a lackadaisical luncher, he did not mind. The shop was, as usual, quite dark; it was set into a little alley, and even with the brightest sunlight, not too much light ever reached inside. So much Camberveigh had observed on his first visit to Anima's shop, which had been made only a little over a fortnight ago, and had been brought about by a chance meeting with the bookseller himself in an air-raid shelter. Anima seemed to prefer it that way.

He stood for some time waiting; perhaps the bookseller was at his luncheon, perhaps he had not heard the little bell tinkle. After waiting a few moments in vain, Camberveigh walked back among stacks of books and touched the bell with his umbrella. This time it brought Anima out of the back room.

A small, wizened man, not very strong, who came obsequiously and with narrowed eyes. "Ah, it is you," he said with an almost offensive familiarity. "You have brought my book back, eh?" His eyes fell upon the package Camberveigh carried, and —could it be?—lit up with a strange, eager sense of possession.

Abruptly Camberveigh heard himself saying, "Why, no, I'm sorry, Mr. Anima. I found it so interesting to read that I wanted to look it over a little longer. I thought you would not care if I kept it at least over Sunday."

Anima was disappointed. He shot a sharp, inquisitive look at Camberveigh, but was apparently satisfied by what he saw in

Camberveigh's face. He nodded curtly, and said very well, Camberveigh might read it if he liked. "But not over Monday, mind! I must have the book back Monday. I need it. I am—studying in it."

Camberveigh left the shop in perplexity. What inexplicable motive had impelled him to keep the book? Why had he suddenly thought there was something shudderingly familiar about the old man whom he had viewed with the most aloof unconcern at every previous meeting? It was extraordinary—and yet, was it, indeed?

It came to him with a feeling of chilling shock that he had seen Anima's face *since* his last visit to the shop. The feeling became conviction, free of all doubt.

Fleeting as it had been, it was Anima's face which had looked at him out of his own mirror that morning!

On his way back to his rooms, he tried to rationalize his actions. But they were incapable of rationalization. Of a sudden there in that dark shop, when confronted by Anima's eagerness to repossess his curious book, Camberveigh had been assaulted by an eerie determination to retain possession of it.

He had acted on impulse, something he had never done before. But now, as he sat there in the underground train, he was conscious of a great turmoil inside him, of a conflict of emotions rooted in some facet through to which he could not reach; once again it was wound up with what he ought to know about the previous day, but there was the conviction that he was close to knowing, that indeed he knew, if only he could understand. It was extraordinary, and it was extremely upsetting to a man as methodical as Camberveigh.

Really, he did not want to see any more of Anima's book. What imp of perversity was responsible for his action? He had had ample time to examine the volume, for which he began now to feel a faint distaste, an aversion which, like his sudden impulse of but a short while ago, he could not explain. He took the book home with him and unwrapped it again.

THE binding was certainly of human skin. There was no telling how old it was, but it was not so much a genuine book as a compilation of various printed things gathered up by some long-dead collector, and bound in this hideous fashion. Camberveigh thought it might conceivably date back to the time when Black Masses and devil worship were flagrant in London, but he was a little hazy on his dates.

He turned from the book and set about answering the morning's post. But he could not keep his attention to the mail; he kept thinking about the book, about Anima and his strange eagerness—first, to press it upon him; then to take it back. He thought about the incredible fascination that the volume seemed to have for him at the same time that he was conscious of its repellence.

Finally, he got up, because he could no longer continue to struggle within himself, and went over to the book and opened it, determined that he might as well be methodical about it and read in it until he was thoroughly tired of it. This he did. He read all about demons, witches, warlocks, cabalistic rites, certain strange practices of Druids, ancient religions, spectres, astrals, hauntings; he read until nightfall, and then put the book aside.

At that hour, it was his custom, being a neat man, to clean his apartment. He set about doing this, and so came upon his gray suit dropped behind an overstuffed chair. One of his best suits, too! How had that come to be there? He picked it up, indignant. Surely he could not have done that even in a state of trance, if he had been in one on Friday! To add to his indignation, he saw when he had rescued it, that not only was the suit badly wrinkled, but it was very dirty and dusty, as if he had carried something heavy against it; and finally, he saw that it was stained rather messily with something that had dried brown into the fabric and looked rusty.

He brushed his coat, and finally carried it tentatively to the wash-bowl in the bathroom, where he wet one of the stains gingerly and scrubbed at it. The water came away a kind of odd brown-red—the water in the bowl began to look the way it did when he had washed out a blood-stained handkerchief after a bad cut a month ago. Camberveigh stood and looked down into the water. What was it he saw there? What depths of darkness and horror looked up

at him from this curiously colored water. He looked at his suit and abruptly thrust it from him. Then he took it up again and gazed at it more intently. If the stains were blood-stains — what made those serried marks of dust and dirt? As if books had been carried there, pressed close to his body!

His mouth and throat went dry, and he began to tremble a little.

What went through his mind was surely impossible! But now, inexorably, his very method began to make itself felt. He went back in memory to the visit he had paid Anima on Thursday; he reconstructed, word for word, their conversation.

"Do you know Rochard Craig?" Anima had asked.

"Yes."

"Ever been in his house?"

"Oh, yes."

"Know your way around then, eh? Seen his collection?"

"Yes, though I don't go in much for books."

"No, you bugs and bird people don't appreciate inanimate things."

So much of it came back with striking clarity. Anima had mentioned Rochard Craig; Anima's envy at mention of certain of Craig's books was unmistakable. What were they? His methodical mind presently gave him a title or two, whereupon he went at once to the papers and looked up those titles among the books listed as missing from Craig's collection. They were there, duly listed.

Camberveigh mixed himself a Scotch and soda and drank it fast.

Then he went back to that horror of a book still lying on the table where he had left it.

After some while of searching, he found the passage that had recurred to memory. *Thus it can be that through the medium of the accursed object, it is possible to send forth one's spirit self, the astral body, and dispossess another for a brief time, but only for so long as the object remains in his possession.* He read on in growing amazement. What was set down there was inconceivable, incredible, and yet . . .

Yet there were those blood-stains on his suit; there were marks as if he had carried away books; there were so many curious facts that they went beyond mere coincidence.

And the accursed object—surely the book!

Given him by Anima, who had somehow then taken possession of him. That was where his lost day had gone. Unbelievable as it might be, against all reason—yet it offered the only comprehensive explanation of what had happened to his Friday.

He read on, struggling to keep his natural scientific prejudice from getting in the way. Apparently there was but one risk run by the projector; until his "object" was returned to him, there existed by its very possession in the hands of another a bond between them; that would surely account for Anima's eagerness to regain his book. Yes, it was undeniable, it made a precise pattern, with every facet fitting neatly into place.

Camberveigh sat back, little beads of cold perspiration on his forehead. He lit a cigarette. He must think.

He knew enough about the laws of evidence to know that if the investigation of Rochard Craig's death—ho, how foul! He revolted against himself at the thought that his hand might have brought it about—ever got to him, he would not have a Chinaman's chance. There was the condition of his suit, the blood could be analyzed easily; there were the books—no doubt whatever that Anima had them; he would certainly testify that Camberveigh had brought them in Friday, on that infamous lost day. And perhaps even the weapon—! He got up on the instant and began an intensive search.

In less than half an hour he discovered it: a little stiletto he had picked up long ago at a sale at Petrie's. It was awkwardly hidden behind a shelf of books. What evidence!

He took it out and washed it thoroughly.

The hour was now quite late; darkness had fallen. He paced his rooms for a while in deep thought, but eventually he returned to the book.

What was it he must do as Anima had done?

Still incredible, he took the book, stretched out on his bed and began to follow the instructions put down in that labored Latin.

It seemed to him after a while that he

slept . . . and that he dreamed. Of foggy streets, and the voice of London muted in the night, a London where nothing was material; and he passed through walls as if they were air, swiftly, swiftly, recognizing streets, lanes, buildings; and he was in Soho, going down that little alley, passing into that hole-in-a-corner shop with its musty books. And it seemed to him that he entered into the wizened, crabbed figure lying asleep there and took his body and destroyed it. And then again the fog and the night and London asleep, save for those dark-eyed, sleepless creatures who walked its streets by night, pitied by darkness, the forgotten and homeless. . . . After a long while he struggled awake, tired as if he had not slept at all. But he had. He had awakened at promptly seven o'clock on Sunday morning.

Ah, what a dream he had had! But—was it a dream? He was still fully clothed. He leaped from his bed and knocked down that book of Max Anima's. With a shudder of revulsion, he picked it up and carried it back out to the table.

IT WAS not a dream. There was his suit, still, with those ghastly, incriminating stains. There was the stiletto, too. Worst of all, there was the book bound in human skin. Who could doubt that it was accursed?

Anger and frustrated rage and bitterness rose in him. It took him some time to quell these emotions, to bring to bear upon his problem the fundamental meticulousness of habitual method. He reviewed his situation; it was not good. Surely it was beyond the bounds of possibility that no one had seen him in the vicinity of Craig's house; Anima in his physical self need not have feared being seen. Even if he, Camberveigh, had guessed, could he tell the police? He could picture the reception such a fantastic rigmarole would receive!

He snatched up the book again, took his suit, and descended to the basement, where he lit a fire in the furnace and carefully destroyed both objects. After he had completed this task, he removed the ashes, cooled the furnace, and ran the ashes down the drain. Then he took the stiletto, walked out, and dropped it into the Thames, which flowed past not far away.

After this he returned home, shaved methodically, and got himself some breakfast, thinking.

If anyone *had* seen him on that lost Friday, by all the laws of average, the police would soon be at his door. At least, the evidence was gone now. He had more than a fighting chance. He began instinctively to gird himself for battle. Actually, he was not guilty, but there was no way in which he could involve Anima, none whatever.

In any case, he was beginning to have grave doubts about the whole matter. That damnable book had actually suggested that no psychic force could compel anyone to do something against his own nature, and the implications of that were monstrous!

He turned on the radio and dialed for the news. He was a little late. He missed the war bulletins and got the late London news. "Max Anima, eccentric bookseller famed for his skill in obtaining rare and unique out-of-print books, was found dead this morning in the rooms behind his bookshop. He had apparently committed suicide. The door of his rooms was locked on the inside . . ."

So that, he thought, was that!

At that moment there was a ponderous and authoritative knock on his door.

Now then, he thought, and went confidently forward to open the door.

An Inspector from Scotland Yard stood on the stoop. With a polite "Good morning," he walked in, quite sure of himself.

The Ultimate Paradox

By THORP McCLUSKY

WHEN Beecham, gardener, chauffeur, and man of all work to Dr. Severance, the retired physicist, first saw the crochety old man standing on the lawn beyond the rose arbor, adjusting a strangely complex machine about his body, he thought nothing of it, but went on with his pruning. In the thirty-odd years he had spent in Dr. Severance's employ he had seen too many strange sights to become immediately interested in every new gadget with which the old man toyed. Cursorily, he noticed that the thing was cumbersome, and that there were many tiny wires and belts connected about it which bothered the master somewhat in the fastening; he noticed a flat, metallic cabinet suspended down Dr. Severance's back, and a composition panel set with a chaos of small dials and switches hung across the aged man's chest. But these details interested Beecham only momentarily, and, after a brief stand-up-and-stretch, during which he wiped a spray of July sweat from his forehead, he bent down again to his work.

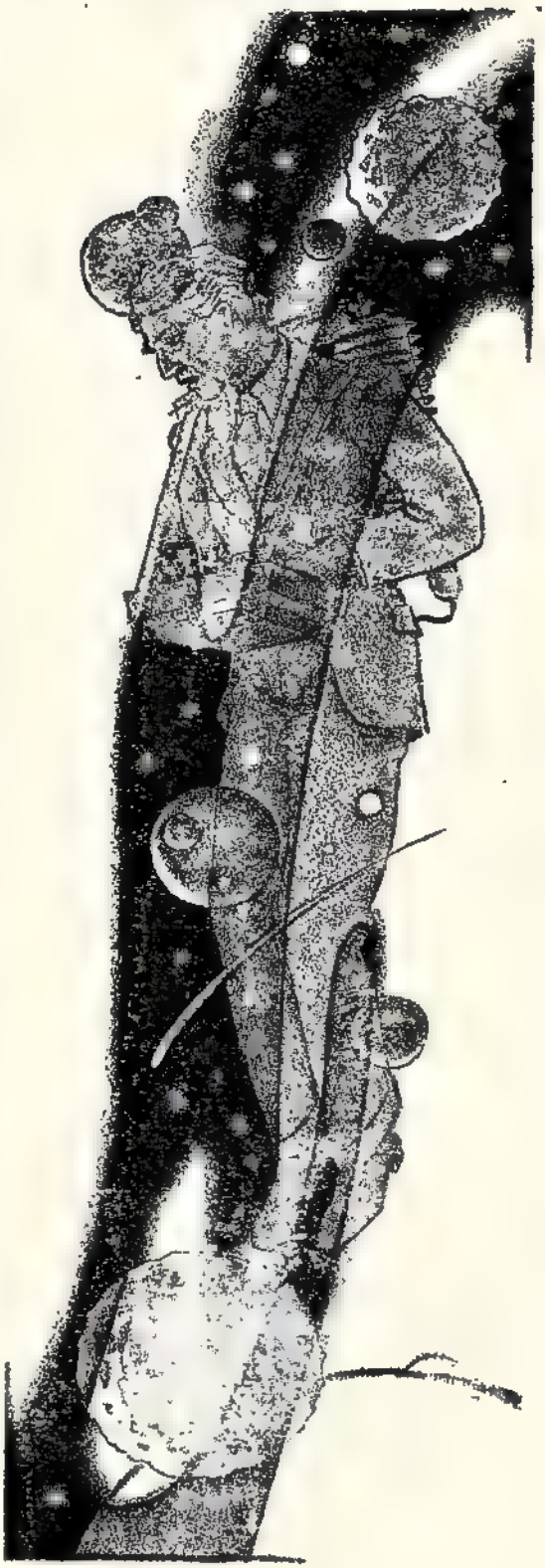
Nor did he look up when, five or six minutes later, the shadow first fell across him. The day had been, up to that moment, broilingly cloudless, and his first impression was that the sky was becoming overcast. Thinking that the shadow might be that of his employer, and without looking up, he said, jovially, "I take it the day is fair enough for you, Dr. Severance, sir?"

Silence, intense and unexpected, answered. Beecham, believing that, after all, it had been a cloud, and anxious for rain to freshen his parched gardens, looked up toward the sky, and screamed, stranglingly, in mortal terror!

Before him, in the acre or so of lawn

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Thirty years in the employ of the scientist and he'd seen a lot of strange sights . . . . but this . . . .



that stretched up to the rear of the house, stood the embodiment of an insane dream: the figure of a man, a thousand feet tall! A mighty metal fabric the size of a battleship was on its back, and its chest was covered with monstrous mechanisms. The nap of its garments was like thickly woven hawsers. The thing's tremendous feet almost covered the lawn, and as Beecham watched he saw the soles of the shoes spreading out in every direction, as fast as a man might walk. Beecham screamed again, and the sound was like the voice of nothing human. And while he watched, paralyzed with fear, the thing grew skyward.

Suddenly the nightmarish petrification left Beecham's legs, and, howling and frothing, he ran across the gardens toward the road. Other people were running from neighboring houses; Beecham saw them gesticulating and shouting. Some covered their faces with their hands, ostrich-like, cowering where they stood. Others ran, aimlessly, stumbling and falling, getting up to run and stumble and fall again.

The shadow was no longer falling on him. The sun shone again, glaringly hot. Beecham looked back. The figure, grown immeasurably more huge, had stepped from the lawn across a wide expanse of pasture land, and was standing at the edge of a wood.

From far down the road Beecham heard the wail of a siren. A long black touring car raced down the boulevard and with brakes screaming, stopped abruptly beside the hedge a few feet from Beecham. It disgorged a number of policemen.

Police Captain Riley looked across the pasture-land toward the wood.

"My God, what can we do against a thing like that!" He was not afraid, but his voice shook. He carried a submachine gun in the crook of his right arm, but, after a moment's hesitation, he shrugged, turned and put it down on the front seat of the automobile.

Siren after siren wailed as the police came in patrol and radio cars, on motorcycles, in commandeered automobiles. The roadway was jammed. Beecham, feeling less afraid, wormed his way toward Captain Riley.

"My God, are we goin' nuts entirely?" Riley was saying.

"Please, officer," Beecham pleaded, plucking at Riley's sleeve, "I know *him*." He gestured toward the figure. "It's Dr. Severance. I'm his man Beecham, and I'd recognize him anywhere."

"Holy Mother of Mercy!" Riley cried, looking first at Beecham, and then at the silent colossus standing in the wood. He said no more, only stared at the thing that grew there, stared with his mouth hanging slackly open, and a greenish sickliness on his face.

BY THAT time there must have been half a thousand people lined along that road, watching the wood a mile away, and the being that rose, second by second, into the sky. For the most part there was silence. There was an occasional scream, and there were curses that were really prayers, but there was no coherent word spoken in all that first ghastly half-hour. For it occupied no more than a half-hour altogether, that first stage. Watches cannot lie, and cannot be frightened.

A horrible sound of crashing trees and crunching shrubbery came from the wood. The figure did not move; it only grew. And the forest crashed as it grew.

Perhaps twenty minutes had passed since Beecham first noticed the shadow. The figure at the end of that time was probably *five miles tall!* This estimate cannot be considered accurate, as it is partly based on the testimony of witnesses who were, at the time, half mad with fear. Afterward, however, measurements were made by municipal surveyors which showed fairly definitely the extent of damage to the timber, and from these measurements it would appear that the impressions left in the wood by the feet of the figure were upwards of three thousand feet in length.

From the time it had stepped from the garden to the center of the wood the figure had not moved. It stood as if anxious not to cause any more panic than would be unavoidable by reason of the fear occasioned by its Gargantuan size. In fact, Captain Riley remembered later having remarked that, "It doesn't seem to want to squash anybody, does it?"

All at once, people noticed that the sounds from the forest had ceased. No one

was able to recall exactly when they ceased —rather most people remembered that their attention was drawn from the rending of live wood to the more homely sounds about them: the chattering of nerve-wracked voices, the clatter of rifle-butts, and the sickish sucking of tires on sticky macadam. But the forest was silent. No more trees fell.

The figure still grew.

The first fright began to leave the majority of those who watched. They spread out along the hedge beside the road, and waited, looking toward the wood. They moved and talked as though they dreamed, as though their dreams were nightmares which had failed to develop the maximum of horror. This curious mass reaction was no doubt due to a subconscious lessening of fear of the figure, which had not threatened them in any way.

The figure rapidly reached such proportions that any attempt to estimate its actual size by comparing the statements of eye-witnesses becomes absurd. The feet and legs towered out of the wood, which they had almost completely hidden, and the rest of the figure was so foreshortened by the nearness of the people huddling beneath it that the upper part of the body was beyond view.

It was possible to watch, almost foot by foot, the steady growth of the colossus. Rank after rank of treetops disappeared, soundlessly, apparently vanishing within the solid leather of the bootsoles. It was not until the feet, after swelling entirely out of the wood, had begun to advance across the pasture that those watching observed an incredibility.

It was as if the wood and pasture-land became a part of the figure, or, conversely, the figure became a part of the landscape, without harm to either! Amazed, the people watched, and saw that a tree, merging into the colossus, would not tremble even in its tiniest leaf, but, on the contrary, would stand erect as if the monster engulfing it were no more than impalpable fog.

Then a man, more sharp-eyed than most, shouted, "The damned thing's transparent!"

Presently all of those who watched saw that this was so. As the great bootsoles, like monstrous ramparts of leather, advanced over the meadows, they saw that they could discern the outlines of trees and rocks *within* their surface, as though encased in brown ice.

The boot-soles, a thousand feet high, had advanced halfway across the meadows. The police began to clear the road. Captain Riley and his men, spread a mile or so up and down the road, continued to watch the sheer brown mountain that, grown out of all semblance to anything describable, towered into infinity a scant hundred yards away. Their automobiles, drawn up alongside the road, stood with motors idling, ready to speed them to safety.

Two state policemen, as though gripped abruptly by a common impulse, vaulted the hedge and cautiously advanced across the meadow. They approached within a hundred feet of the billowing brown wall. Then one drew his automatic, dubiously emptied its magazine into the advancing mass. Turning, he looked at the policemen scattered along the road, and grinned. Then, waving his hand, he walked directly into the tawny transparent immensity.

For possibly twenty or thirty feet he continued. Once or twice he put his hand before his eyes, as a man, walking in a thick smudge, might do. Then he came out, and held his hands high over his head to show that he was unhurt.

He talked to his companion. They stood close together. The city police clambered over the hedge and came toward them. The brownish wall continued to advance. It filled half the sky, like a great cloud.

The *thing* was becoming colorless, and more and more transparent. It reached the policemen, and crossed the road. There was nothing solid about it. The men walked in it as they might walk in a dirty, fine rain. It had become a faint *brownishness* that tinted faces, houses, trees, the sky and the earth alike, but that had no reality to it.

WITHIN the hour the vanguard of a swarm of reporters and sensation hunters began to arrive. They were disappointed, for there was nothing to see. Except for an unusual brownish tint which hung in the sky, and which made the late afternoon heavens strikingly beautiful, there was nothing, nothing at all.

"What was it?" the papers asked, later.

"A hoax? Mass hypnotism? What caused the destruction in the forest? Why the great footprints, etched in splintered trees?"

Captain Riley, seeing that the danger, if any had ever existed, was over, sent his men back to the city. He was about to clamber into his car himself when he saw Beecham. He remembered that Beecham had told him something crazy.

"Hey, you! What's this you said to me about knowing *that?*" He waved an ineffectual arm in a half-circle that took in half the world.

Beecham licked his lips.

"I said it looked like Dr. Severance," he mumbled.

Riley considered. He felt empty, like a child who has seen a bubble blow up and burst. "Get in," he growled. "We're going over and have a talk with your Dr. Severance."

The car, Riley driving, with Beecham huddled beside him, hurtled savagely down the road and pulled up with a jerk before the Severance estate. Riley, mumbling angrily, gestured to Beecham to precede him up the walk. The screen door was unlatched.

Beecham entered, Riley close behind him. They walked through the library. There was no one in the room. At the far end of the library was a heavy, golden-oak door.

"Where's that go?"

Beecham hesitated. "That's Dr. Severance's study. He never lets me inside."

"You go ahead," Riley snarled. "By God, you open that door."

Beecham's trembling hands pushed open the door . . .

WHEN old Charles Severance, standing on the lawn beside his house, adjusted the straps about his body and threw certain small switches in the panel on his coat, he knew with a fair degree of certainty just what would happen. He knew that the mechanism, or rather the complexity of mechanisms, which he had devised was capable of doing two things. It built up a field, electrical in nature, yet which tapped sources of pure energy which were even more fundamental than electricity, which exerted an explosive force upon every proton and electron, on every fleck of energy, within a certain radius. In non-technical language, it was a repulsive force, universal yet limited to its own boundaries, which caused every electon within those boundaries to recede from its proton, and every proton in turn to repulse every other proton. Thus any matter placed within its field, and acted upon, grew, retaining its original mass, diminishing in density; the apparatus itself, being within the field, also grew, and even the field itself, because its action was cumulative, grew. This entire process was progressive and proportionate.

Many scientists have long known that there is a universal yardstick of energy. Call it by any name—call it electricity, although we know that electricity is only a manifestation of it, as is gravitation—call it pure force—call it God; whatever it is, it is the building material of all the universes. Doctor Severance had discovered a way to pour this energy into his field. He had also observed that this pure force obeyed certain simple laws. It spread uniformly throughout a given space, like water, which seeks a common level, and maintains, within narrow limits, a certain density. Released within the confines of Doctor Severance' field, this force would immediately commence adding energy, or mass, to every proton and electron within the field until, should the process not be halted, the field itself, and everything it contained, would become a ball of pure force. The fundamental energy was apparently available, in limitless quantities, throughout all space.

Doctor Severance was well aware that he could never reverse the action of his apparatus. Energy once poured into its field could never be withdrawn. Once he subjected his body to its influence there was no going back. . . .

Standing on the lawn and growing, growing—Doctor Severance, with the thoroughness which was second nature with him, mentally recorded his sensations. He had synchronized his apparatus so that his density would increase in correct proportion to his mass.

He felt no bodily sensations whatever, no nausea, no dizziness, nothing. Yet the ground sank away from him on all sides, the houses shrank to doll-like proportions, and the road before his house became a

tiny black ribbon. He looked down. The traffic had stopped for a mile or more up and down the road, and one stumbling figure, seemingly an inch tall, in the greenish patch that was his garden, he knew to be Beecham. He smiled, but then, noticing that the lawn on which he stood was growing too small, he stepped into the wood.

Growing, growing, growing—he watched the landscape fall away from all about him and the hills became little ridges across the earth. All at once he noticed that the trees were crumbling beneath his feet, and, afraid that he might unwittingly destroy property and human life, he hurriedly switched off the tremendous surge of pure force which had, until that moment, kept his density constant. He did not know exactly what would happen; he might conceivably die, but it was better that he die than that the world be destroyed.

He looked about. The horizon was sweeping away from him, and hills and mountains climbed into view. Beneath him clouds billowed, and fragments of the earth were obscured.

As the ocean of air above him grew thinner the vault of heaven darkened and became purplish; the clouds beneath him were like the surface of a tumultuous sea, splashed with gold by the sunset.

He noticed that he was becoming dizzy. The sky above him was almost black. He fumbled beneath his shoulder for the nozzle of the oxygen tube, and fastened the mouthpiece across his face. The dizziness left him.

He looked at the sun, a blinding, bluish-white ball, with great vari-colored streamers writhing and tossing on its surface and far out in space. The sky had become completely black, and was spattered with millions of hard, unblinking stars of every color, each piercingly bright, each inconceivably remote.

The earth beneath his feet had become a great ball. Along its eastern edge there lay a belt of purplish darkness. He noticed that he could no longer feel it, as something solid, beneath him. He looked down once more, and saw that, like a great ball a hundred feet in diameter, it was moving slowly away from him. Half of it was bright and shining, like aluminum, while the other half was a blackness against the stars. Across the edge of the earth the moon appeared. He could see it move. Apparently his time-mode was becoming slower. Watching the moon, it seemed for only a few minutes, he saw it come entirely within view. The earth had diminished to a ball the size of a house. The moon moved faster.

Both the earth and the moon were moving away. They became a pretty little mechanism the size of a dinner plate, the moon, like a white cherry, encircling the earth in the time it takes to draw a breath.

Presently they were lost in the glare of the sun.

He experienced no sensation of either cold or warmth.

Apparently a non-luminous body in free space could not radiate heat. He touched his hands together, and felt the pulse beating in his wrists. Looking downward at his body, he saw half of it bathed in bright sunlight, the other half outlined as a blackness across the stars.

Almost within arm's reach he noticed a ball the size of a small shot. It was vaguely reddish in color, and spinning so rapidly that the surface markings upon it were blurred. It rushed toward him. He knew that it was the planet Mars, and, full of a vast curiosity, he watched it bury itself in his side. He turned his head, and in a second saw it emerge from the small of his back. He chuckled.

WITHIN minutes the solar system swept by. Jupiter passed almost as close as did Mars, but seemed the size of a cherry-stone surrounded by whirling motes of light. Saturn, with her rings and galaxy of moons, he picked out against the blinding blanket of stars by her rapid progression across their motionless field. Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto he did not observe. The sun became only another star amid the multitude. For a moment, before he lost sight of it in the swarm, he believed that he saw it surrounded by rushing circles of light, which could only be the planets whirling about it, hundreds of times in each second.

Presently the very stars themselves were moving, at first slowly, and then with the speed of meteors. The little cluster in which he found himself became disk-shaped, and

then it was spinning, faster and faster. The individual stars had become indistinguishable, and he only saw them as clusters that, apparently, stretched on without end. A universe lay across his thumbnail; a multitude of universes spangled his body. And still there was no end to them; they merged into each other until even *they* were merely flecks of light surrounding him and extending onward into infinity.

Then a strange thing happened. He noticed that the universes were no longer giving out light. Perhaps they had been slowly dimming for several moments; he was not sure. But, nevertheless, they had become lightless while, paradoxically, it was becoming lighter all about! A faint, almost intangible glow was growing steadily, all about him. The individual universes, even as lightless motes, impalpable as dust, were no longer distinguishable. But in their place he saw vague clusters that seemed to be inanimate matter!

They were gigantic, and they filled his vision like gargantuan mountains. But, like the universes, they became swiftly smaller, and, as their size diminished, their outlines became more plain. At last, and beyond the possibility of doubt, he saw that he stood amid a cluster of huge rocks, apparently of pure quartz, that towered over his head.

He felt no surprise, but only a tremendous exaltation. He knew in that moment that he had successfully stepped upward a plane in the gigantic cosmic stairway, and that he was on another world! Those quartz-like rocks all about were, he knew, microscopic specks of sand. He stood in their midst and watched them diminish and others like them come marching into his horizon.

Gingerly he turned on his universal force mechanism. He needed mass, the mass of a billion universes!

And still he grew, until he approximated what he believed to be the height of a man. Then he turned off his mechanism.

All about him stretched a wilderness of sand, a desert of limitless expanse, rolling away, lifeless, flat, and heat-tortured, to the horizon. The sky overhead was a deep blackish blue, and no cloud broke the monotony of its vaulted arching. Halfway down the sky hung a dwarfish, blue sun, crackling out the heyday of its youth like an electric flame.

The sun was not old, but the planet was already old and dead, burned to death, most likely, he thought. Without doubt there was no place for him on this sunbaked world. He was already becoming faint from the heat. He glanced at the dial on his oxygen tank, which registered three-fourths capacity, and, with a regretful glance about him, turned on his mechanism.

He had learned so pitifully little about this new universe into which he had cast himself! Able to step upward from universe to universe at will, able to encircle within the confines of his field an entire cosmos, yet, his apparatus at rest, he became, on the surface of any world to which chance brought him, merely a halting, stumbling, defenseless old man.

The sum total of the knowledge he had gathered about this world, this universe, he was leaving, was negligible. He could not know if the desert in which he had stood covered the entire surface of the planet, or was limited in extent. He could not tell if the blue sun blazed fifty million or a billion miles away.

He watched the planet dwindle and vanish, the sun merge amid others that blanketed the black sky with unfamiliar constellations; he watched those constellations themselves fall together into puffs of light that merged into other puffs of light. And presently he felt himself developing into another space.

ALL about him billowed a sea of intensely crimson light. He could not feel it, because he was impalpable, and it flowed through him without harming him as molten iron flows in a vacuum. He did not dare admit pure force within the atoms of his body until he definitely knew the nature of the substance surrounding him, and that it could not harm him, so, after a brief pause he continued on, growing, growing, growing, while the crimson flow swirled about him and through him.

Presently he felt the red fire washing through and about his eyeballs, thinning above him, giving him the sensation a swimmer might experience while emerging, with

opened eyes, from beneath the surface of water. He looked out upon a sea of leaping fire, extending in every direction as had the sandy desert a few moments before. Above his head was a lake of blackness, strewn with stars.

He knew then that he had been within a sun. And so he went on, and that sun shrank within him until it became like a red orange lying within his chest, and the stars and universes moved toward him once more, and became little clouds of energy that passed within his body, and a new space opened about him once again.

He saw that he was enveloped in a grayish fog, lying thick and dark about his feet and legs and up to his waist, but thinning to a dirty darkness about his head and shoulders. He could see no more than a few feet in any direction, and the sliminess in which he stood was agitated, now and again, as if by the passage of some form of life through it. Shuddering, he continued his growth until he stood in the grayness like a man in a limitless puddle. Mist swirled about his face, and he could barely see his shoetops.

He allowed energy greater than that of the universe he had encompassed to flow into him, and watched the dirty slime stir momentarily beneath his feet as the atoms of his body pushed it aside. Then he stepped out briskly and aimlessly, eager to explore this strange world.

He realized that he was in some form of bog which, because of its shallowness, could not be very extensive. He was right, for he had scarcely walked fifty paces when the ground beneath him shelved upward very slightly, and he found himself waist deep in a forest of lush, whitish, fern-like vegetation. He continued struggling onward through the luxuriant growth for another hundred yards, searching for an open space, but the ground, flat and featureless as a dinner plate, remained encumbered with the forestlike growth. He frequently heard the crashing of heavy bodies through the forest, and knew that this young, moisture-drenched planet thronged with life.

At no previous time had he regretted his infirmities so much as now. Here, all about him, stretched a young world, rich in vegetation, rich in atmosphere, rich in animal life. He longed to walk beneath the pallid, gigantic vegetation, but he could not, for he already towered above it! To ensure his safety, he had increased his stature to an extent that prohibited adventure. He was a giant, unable to do more than peer down into a weird, gloomy world.

His old muscles ached from the exertion of walking, and, seeing no sign of an open space where he might sit, he turned on his mechanism again until the great vegetation beneath him was no more than grass, inches high. Then he sat down, and held his forehead in his hands. He was deathly tired.

HE MADE atmospheric tests, for sooner or later he must find a world on which he could live. The atmosphere was rich in oxygen, saturated with water vapor, capable of supporting human life. He recharged his oxygen tanks, and standing erect, looked about him.

The fog was so thick that he could not see the ground beneath his feet. He went on growing, growing, until his head topped the clouds. But there was no break in their ranks. They extended onward, like a mournful sea, in every direction. He started walking, in three-mile strides, and went on until he was tired. Occasionally he felt uneven hummocks beneath his feet, and knew them to be hills and mountains; again he felt water sopping his boots, and knew that he walked in rivers and lakes. But there was no end to the blanket of cloud.

So, again, he looked into the heavens, at the great yellow sun warming this watery world, at the unfamiliar stars that would soon be atoms within his body, and slowly, tiredly, sent himself onward into the infinite.

While he grew, and while universes and yet other universes became pinpoints of light within him, he slept.

When he awoke it was to the same kaleidoscopic change he knew would be. Star clusters all about him leaped into view, diminished and vanished in puffs of light. He craned his head and read the dial of his oxygen tank. He had slept (although it is absurd to speak of time when everywhere, except within his field, time flowed like a millrace) possibly twenty hours. With-

in a short time he would have to replenish his oxygen, or perish.

Again the stars dimmed about him; the light from overhead strengthened. Once more he was surrounded by mountainous grains of sand, shrinking away from him as he grew, and he knew that he was upon the surface of a world. Here he found air, water, pleasant fields and gentle beasts, and he stayed on this planet many days.

But because there was no life with which he could exchange ideas he became lonely, and presently he went on once more. Beyond time, beyond space, beyond all things except himself, he climbed the awful ladder he had built into infinity. The gray left his hair, and it was white.

He lost count of the worlds he visited, and of the universes shrinking and growing before his eyes. He lost count of the times he slept, and of the food he ate, and of the things he saw. His life was a constant halting, and going on. The prime motive in it was the oxygen tank, which he filled unnumerable times.

So years, as his body knew years, passed. . . .

HE MET and conversed with creatures more perfect than humans, and with creatures of intelligence more abased than devils. He saw holes in space made by suns so great that not even light could go forth from them. He saw living things, without minds, more huge than Betelgeuse; he stood upon a great green planet so vast that, with pure force filling his field until he could barely lift an arm, he remained still so impalpable that he could walk through metals. He met a mighty philosopher on a tiny, dying planet, who preferred to journey on with him. Together they constructed an hermetically sealed cabinet, which, philosopher and all, he could carry within his pocket.

They went on, and they might well enough have gone on together until they died, but for a strange thing.

Once again they saw the universes fading into lightless specks about them, and the brighter light flowing down from above. Once again the bits of inanimate matter became pebbles, and they stood in grass which towered above them like a great forest. The grass fell away from them, as they grew, and they looked upon a green world, into a blue, cloudless sky. They saw, halfway down the sky, a yellow sun. And they thought, "This world is good."

The forest of grass fell to Doctor Severance's knees, and then to his ankles. Looking about him, he felt that this world reminded him strangely of one he had left long ago. Then a few yards away, he saw the house he had lived in on Earth. . . .

There was no mistaking it. The warm, brownish brick walls, the leaded windows, the sloping, slate roof, the trellised walk leading to the garden, everything was there, as if he had only just stepped out of doors.

Dazedly, he snapped off his mechanism. Another strange thing happened. Everything became black, as though he were blinded. He could still feel the earth beneath his feet, but he could see nothing. He tried to take a step, and found that he could walk. Then, after he had taken a few steps, the sunlight burst upon his eyes again. Feeling slightly bewildered, he stumbled toward the house, a few feet ahead.

Mechanically he tapped upon the glass window in the small cabinet in which the Philosopher lived, and watched that circular transparency begin to revolve, as the Philosopher hastened to come out and join him.

Walking like one confronted by an incredibility, he entered the house, and went into his study. Nothing was changed, papers neatly piled beneath paperweights lay on his desk, and a warm midsummer's breeze came into the room from the garden. He sat down at his desk, pillowed his face upon his arms, and tried to think. He lost tract of time, but long minutes, a half hour, hours passed. The Philosopher waited.

There was a commotion at the front of the house, voices, footsteps. Beecham came in, followed by a policeman. . . .

Nothing of a dramatic nature occurred. Doctor Severance looked up mildly, and asked Beecham what he wanted, and who the gentleman was, and the utterly bewildered Beecham mumbled something, and Captain Riley, thinking that Beecham was a fool, mumbled something also. and both men left the room.

But before they went out they did not fail to notice the little metallic box on the table, with its circular window, and the many-legged, scaly thing that emerged from it and sat upon it, and watched them through black, bottomless eyes. And Beecham looked suspiciously at the curious harness on the floor just behind the desk, and remembered that it was very like the harness he had seen on the monstrous thing standing in the lawn, earlier in the afternoon.

In a very few days the apparition in the skies was forgotten. Beecham, alone, wondered why, in an afternoon, Doctor Severance's hair had grown completely white.

AND in the laboratory, the two beings, the Philosopher and Doctor Severance, studied and planned and wondered. They sought, among other things, to know what had become of the years during which they had wandered up the infinities. Dimly, they sensed behind that paradox a simple law, and, in the workings of that law, power.

They built a curious globe, and on it they ruled innumerable circles, which they called by many names. And on this globe time was a circle, and a certain energy was another. And they sought to prove that, as Doctor Severance had gone through all matter and through all energy, so had he progressed over all time, from the beginning to the ending of things. And that, continuing along the great circle drawn about the curious globe, representing energy, it necessarily followed that, reaching the point on its length from which he had started, the same point on the time circle would be in juxtaposition. What was time? They knew that our stellar universe had come and gone and come again a trillion times during each second they had lived on those other worlds.

They sought to solve another truth; that in their bodies were all the universes, while yet they remained tiny motes upon one small planet circling a minor sun; that in the heavens were all things and, too, in every speck of dust were all things, that were, and are, and ever shall be.

Now the Philosopher, who, despite his utter ugliness and loathsomeness (as judged by humans) was a great and noble soul, believed that, with more experience, might come a solution of the problems which evaded them. So it was that one evening Beecham, knocking at the study door and failing to receive an answer, went in, and found no one there. The strange harness was gone, and, although Beecham did not know, another like it. . . .

Beecham, looking in the corner, observed the curious box in which he had seen the Philosopher. As yet uncertain whether to call in the police, he picked it up idly, and caught himself wishing, with regret, that he had had a better look, that day, at the creature the master picked up in the garden.

In the July WEIRD TALES

AUGUST DERLETH *tells us about . . . .*

"The Watcher from the Sky"

also

MANLY WADE WELLMAN • RAY BRADBURY

• ROBERT BLOCH EDMOND HAMILTON •

Out May First

The Witch

By WILLIAM DE LISLE

THE farmer loathed the priest
for all his wealth
and begged that I should
take him off by stealth.

He promised gold to work such deadly harm;
he called him snouting Paul and shaveling monk
and other names. Trembling with hate he slunk
out of my hut. And I began the charm.

I called for Meg to bring the mandrake weed
that shrieks when it is dragged;
for Rennie Stump who lives by Hangman's Common
to croon an incantation for the deed;
we gathered in the cunning herbal woman
to stew the simples: when the night was fit
a dozen gib-cats round the throat we slit.

Then sat we all beneath a westering star.
We glared with malice on his window pane;
and when we howled together for his bane
the rectory casement gently swung ajar.
He got him slowly, slowly, from his bed:
the charm went blasting home—he fell down dead.

Giles leapt for glee on his fresh-heapen mold
but when I pleaded, cringing, for the gold,
he spat and swore, and spurned me in a ditch.
Out and away—he snarled—thou noisome witch.

Staggers and glanders took his colts away;
foot-rot destroyed his ewes and lambs: one day
insane he gave his farmstead to the fire
and hanged him from a rafter in his byre.

The Music-Box From Hell

By EMIL PETAJA

ROLPH MACE hunched under the awning of the antique shop, glowering at the March drizzle as he waited for his bus. If it hadn't started to rain he could have walked, and saved seven pennies. Or if his Aunt Audrey would hurry up and die he wouldn't have to make trips downtown for medicine.

After she died he could shut up both the east and west wings of the old Mace Mansion, and live in two little rooms in back. Wouldn't cost one-quarter the money it cost now, with the east wing open, and her burning gas all the time. And a part-time maid.

Rolph's pinched-up face grimaced at the thought of all that money going to waste,

Heading by A. B. TILBURNE

Recorded on metal in this [illegible] a demoniac and cunning song to [illegible]

when it rightfully belonged to him—as her only heir.

"Could I sell you anything?" a voice at his elbow asked suddenly.

Rolph turned to see a cherub-faced little man wearing a frock coat and white side-whiskers smiling at him jovially. He was, apparently, the owner of the antique shop.

Rolph gave a quick glance at the motley assortment of items in the pleasantly-littered window, and shuddered with actual horror at the thought of parting with hard cash for those *things*.

His Aunt Audrey loved antiques. She loved music, too, and was forever ordering chamber music records on the sly. With her own money, of course—but Rolph had for more than ten years considered it *his* and resented every mouthful she ate.

He turned his lean, stooped shoulders away from this shop-owner in high distaste, not deigning to even answer him.

"I have just about anything you might want, inside," the odd little man went on affably. *"Anything."*

"I don't want anything," snapped Rolph.

"Nothing?" said the little man. "You must be very happy. . . ."

Rolph's pinched, bird-like features puckered. Yes, there was something he wanted. He wanted Aunt Audrey to die. . . .

"YOU see that ring on the white velvet, just under the candelabra?" the little man with the side-whiskers went on, insinuatingly, paying no heed to Rolph's obvious snub. "That once belonged to the Borgias. Lucrezia, I believe. Quite adept in the art of poisoning—they tell me. . . ."

Rolph's lip twitched. He gave a quick look at the ring, scowling.

"Of course, me—" the little man continued, "I'd choose some other method of—er—eliminating besides poison. It can always be traced."

Rolph's lip curled contemptuously. He knew that! How well he knew that! Hadn't he tried to figure a way by which . . .

The little man chuckled, as at a secret joke.

Rolph began to squirm.

"What way would you use?" he asked, licking his thin lips.

"Music."

"Music!"

"Why, yes."

"But—"

"Sorry. I have to go in now." The weird little man moved into the dusky doorway. "In case you're ever in the market for some really remarkable antiques—"

"Wait—" Rolph cried. He didn't quite know why.

But the little man was gone.

THE suburban bus came and went, but Rolph just stood there under the awning, racked by indecision. Finally, with a little growl, he stepped into the antique shop doorway, where the little man had disappeared, and wormed his way past littered tables to a little dark back room.

There was the little man, all smiles.

"Decided there was something you wanted, after all, eh?"

Rolph nodded uncertainly.

"I want—" He must be subtle about this. "I want a present for my Aunt."

The little man chuckled.

"Ah! An Aunt who loves antiques!"

"She also is very fond of—music," Rolph put in hastily.

"Ah! Antiques. Music. Good!" The little man rubbed his pudgy hands together happily. "This Aunt of yours is—perhaps—*wealthy?*"

Rolph scowled.

"Ah! Mustn't ask personal questions, must we!" The little man bustled over to a dark corner, and pulled a string connected to a bare light bulb. Unhappy orange light sprayed the crowded little room. "It so happens that I have just the thing you want, unless I am sadly mistaken!"

He tugged a small ornamented box off a shelf, and set it down on the table in front of them. Whipping a silk handkerchief out of his pocket, he began to polish it vigorously.

"What is it?" Rolph asked, eyeing the black oblong box dubiously.

"Katchooo!" the little man sneezed, from the dust. "Pardon me. This—" He pointed at it dramatically, "is called *the music-box from Hell!"*

Rolph sniffed. He didn't relish idle melodramatics. He wanted to buy, or—better still — cajol the old man's music-

murder secret, and get back to Mace Mansion.

"All right," he said impatiently, when the little man paused. "*Why* is it called the music-box from Hell?"

The little man pursed his lips gravely. "That, my son, is a long story."

"Well, I don't want to hear it."

"No?" The little man's face fell. "Well, suffice to say that this music-box was manufactured by the wizard, Syn Borkillish, of Nurenburg, in the early Sixteenth Century. It constitutes the result of a particularly fiendish pact he made with an evil power. He—"

"Get to the point, man!" hissed Rolph. "What can it do?"

The little man's eyes, bright as shoe buttons, seemed to look right into Rolph's miserly mind.

"Recorded on metal in this little box," he said, "is a daemoniac and cunning song to which no man can listen without—"

"Yes?"

"Without being snatched off the face of the earth into the nethermost Hell!"

Rolph's piggish eyes snapped fire.

"And you expect me to believe all that medieval nonsense!"

The little man shrugged.

"Would you like a sample?"

Rolph blinked.

"But—"

The little man laughed gleefully.

"No. Hearing just a few notes or strains can't hurt you. It's the whole song. It forms a hideous pattern which at last seizes hold of its victim's mind and soul, and finally—as the last plangent chords are sounded—by an evil rearrangement of his vibratory pattern, the listener is swept irresistibly into the Black Limbo where the demon who conceived this vile song holds sway. . . ."

ROLPH gaped at the strange little box with new respect.

"Shall we have a sample?" the little man invited again.

"No. I'll take your word for it," Rolph replied hastily. "But—I don't see any levers or dials on it. How do you set it running?"

"By simply calling out the demon's name."

"Which is—?"

The little man said it, whereupon the box came to audible life. A windy sigh escaped it, which abruptly grew to the proportions of a banshee's tormented wail. At times the song had a hauntingly sweet character, but under this melodic line were sinister, mocking intimations of carnate sin and evilness.

The non-human voice seemed to beckon—to call Rolph into timeless depths. . . .

First it was merely unnerving, then unbearable.

"Shut it off!" he shrieked.

The little man shouted another outlandish word. The song vanished.

Rolph's pinched face illuminated with avarice. He almost drooled.

He must get hold of that box! It would dispose of Aunt Audrey beautifully, and no one would ever know. *Corpus delicti,* you understand. Then she wouldn't be around any more to waste money on medicine and part-time maids, and order phonograph records on the sly.

But—he mustn't act eager. He would outwit this simple fool—get the music-box for nothing, if humanly possible.

He ran his finger gingerly along its weirdly-cold surface.

"How much are you asking for this piece of junk?" he asked casually.

The little man beamed on him.

"Oh, a mere nothing. Ten thousand dollars."

"*Ten thousand dol*— And that's your rock-bottom price?"

"I'm afraid so." The little man sighed. "I wouldn't sell it at all, only I need the money so desperately. You see, my shop is mortgaged to the hilt."

"Umm." Rolph's eyes narrowed craftily. After all, once Aunt Audrey was out of the way he could return the music-box, and tell this stupid little fool he'd changed his mind. Thus he would get the *use* of it without having paid a cent! "I'll take it. Only—I'll have to send you a check tomorrow morning. Will that be satisfactory?"

The little man nodded, rather wistfully. "Yes. That will be fine."

AUDREY MACE was a sweet-faced old lady who found it more expedient to let her half-sister's penurious offspring manage the affairs of her lovely old house on

Windsholm Hill. All she asked of life now was to sit by her little parlor gas-fire and listen to Haydn or Mozart on her old phonograph.

Even that pleasure had been dimmed in latter years, not only by Rolph's persistent growlings about the few record albums she allowed herself to purchase, but by the fact that she was slowly going deaf, and had to resort to the use of a hearing aid.

She had lived an abundant life, and her memories were with her always, like a warm shawl to cover her chilling bones.

As the dying rays of the sun sifted through the dripping elm leaves outside her window, she sat motionless in her favorite wing-back chair, staring sadly at the blue gas-flame.

Her blue-veined fingers toyed with the hearing-aid box in her lap.

Rolph swept bat-like into the cozy old-fashioned room, and immediately switched off the little lamp by her elbow, and turned down the gas.

"You don't need a light yet!" he shouted in annoyance. "And it's not cold out!"

Aunt Audrey appeared not to notice. She smiled wanly. Rolph always acted as if they were paupers. It was true there wasn't as much money as there had been, but there was plenty—more than enough for anything they might need.

"Rolph, I was wondering if—"

"Listen, Aunt Audrey," Rolph burst out, waving a slip of paper. "You've been buying records again! Twenty-one dollars in the last three months! My God, do you think I'm *made* of money!"

Aunt Audrey looked bewildered, but said nothing. She sat quite still while he went through his scathing denunciations of all musicians and all music. His indignation at finding that bill in the mail box on his way home had made him forget for a moment, all about the music-box. . . .

"Rolph," she ventured timidly, when his tirade subsided. "I hate to ask you to do it, but could you run downtown again, and buy—"

"Buy, buy, buy!" he shrieked. "You do nothing but sit here all day thinking up things to buy!"

His aunt's eyes left his furious face and went wearily back to the frugal gas-fire.

"All right, dear. It doesn't really matter. . . ."

ALL in a rush Rolph remembered the music-box. So with an awkward show of affection he bent down and pecked at Aunt Audrey's withered cheek.

"Anyway," he tittered nervously, "I can't go downtown now. I happened to pass an antique shop, and so I went in and bought something for you!"

Now was a good time to do it, Rolph thought, his crafty eyes roving. The maid was gone for the day. No one would be calling. Besides, he wanted to be able to send the thing back to the shop tomorrow morning, so he wouldn't have to pay for it.

He brought the oddly-carved box in and set it down on the table, just in front of his aunt's chair.

"A present? For *me?*"

Aunt Audrey was incredulous and excited as a girl.

"Why, this is so sweet of you, Rolph. . . ."

She sat back in her chair, dabbing at her eyes with a lace handkerchief, overcome with emotion. So Rolph *did* love her after all—to bring her such a beautiful gift!

"It's a music-box," Rolph explained, nervously. And, in a cracked voice, he called out the demon's name.

He looked a last look down at her gray head, and his thin lips parted in a ghoulish leer.

Aunt Audrey sat back in her chair, a blissful smile on her face. A gift from Rolph! Why, surely she had misjudged him all these years!

The fearful song spawned in the gathering gloom. The moaning wind. The banshee's keening. The falsely-sweet melody. . . .

"I've got to get out of here!" Rolph muttered, and fled.

Aunt Audrey leaned forward, listening intently, a sparkle in her blue eyes.

Rolph took a last backward glance, then ran up the swirling stairway. He didn't want to be caught in the web of that unholy song from Hell. . . .

ROLPH spent half an hour upstairs, gloating. Now the whole estate was his. Mace Mansion, and the park surrounding it.

All Aunt Audrey's securities, and her lovely dollars in the bank. . . .

"It must be all over by now," he told himself, triumphantly, and sped downstairs.

It took only one glance in the little parlor to tell him that something had gone wrong.

Blazing rage took possession of Rolph as he saw that his Aunt Audrey still sat there in her chair, placid and smiling. He cursed as he ran to her, and the fury in his eyes made the old lady shiver.

He turned to the music-box, which was still venting its uncanny song, which had now become incredibly soft and sinister, like the hissing of serpents.

"It's a *fake!*" Rolph shrieked, sobbing with disappointment. "The box hasn't any supernatural power! The antique shop owner tricked me!"

Aunt Audrey seemed to be smiling—as if she knew!

"I'll fix it!" cried Rolph, striding to the table and reaching for the box. "I'll break it in a million—"

What was happening?

His hands trembled, refusing to touch the box.

It was his ears! Something was wrong with his ears!

"God! What—"

Searing pain severed his brain. In one brief flash knowledge came to him, but by then it was too late.

It was the music—the demon's song.

Its unhallowed patterns had woven about his brain and ensnared it. Just in that brief, unwary moment. . . . And now his mind was incapable of thinking coherently. It couldn't remember the word that would stop the music and free him. Nor could his mind direct his leg-muscles to act—to *run*. . . .

Everything blurred in his sight. The rococo wallpaper patterns blended into one empurpled smear. The prim little parlor became the vortex of a maelstrom.

Rolph clutched at his throat involuntarily.

The music went wild, chaotic, then reached a monstrous climax. . . .

"HELLO. Is anybody home?"

An odd little figure in a frock coat and white side-whiskers peeked into the silent parlor. His shoe-button eyes saw Aunt Audrey sitting quietly in her chair, watching the blue gas-flame. Then they saw the music-box on the table.

The little man uttered an improbable word. The demoniac music stopped.

"Forgive my unseemly intrusion," the little man said, stepping toward Aunt Audrey's chair. "I've been knocking on your door for hours, it seems. I wouldn't have burst in this way, only it's terribly important. You see, I contracted to sell a young man who lives at this address a music-box, and—"

He paused to stare gravely down at a peculiar green splotch on the faded carpet, then went on.

"I've thought it over carefuly, and decided that this particular music-box is not to be sold, ever. In fact, I've decided to burn it. . . ."

"My nephew is—" the old lady began.

"So *you* are the aunt he was buying it for!" The little man shook his head and clucked his tongue indignantly. "I can see how right I was to come here. So you're the lady who dotes on antiques and music! Well, well! I practically bankrupted myself because I couldn't bear to part with my treasures. You and I have mutual manias, so it would seem logical that we—"

Aunt Audrey stopped him with a merry laugh.

"You might just as well stop talking, sir!" she exclaimed. "I can't hear a word you're saying. My nephew, who seems to have gone out, brought me this lovely old music-box. Of course, I couldn't hear it either."

She sighed wistfully. "I just *know* it plays some lovely Mozart melody! You see, sir, the battery in my hearing aid went dead this afternoon—and dear Rolph didn't seem to want to spare the money to buy another!"

Blood From a Stone

By ***MANLY WADE WELLMAN***

Only one sort of illness comes and goes thusly, and evils other than germs bring it on

THE doctor told John Thunstone that nothing was wrong with him, and for the time they were together in the examining room it was apparently true; but Thunstone had felt dizzy and faint as he entered, and as he left he had to call on the final ounce of power in his big body to keep from falling on the sidewalk.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

"This tells me what I had to know," he assured himself. "Only one sort of illness comes and goes so conveniently for those who hate me. And evils other than germs bring it on."

A taxi returned him to his hotel, and during the ride he mastered his weakness of limb enough to enter the lobby and ride up in the elevator without being noticed by any guests or attendants, whose impulse to help would have been useless and embarrassing. His key weighed a ton as he unlocked the door of his suite. Once inside, he leaned against the jamb as though he had been shot through the body. Then, walking leadenly to his desk, he fumbled out a worn, dingy little book entitled *Egyptian Secrets* and bearing, perhaps inaccurately the name of Albertus Magnus and author.

Inside the back cover his own hand had jotted down a sort of index. Under the heading *Persons bewitched and punishment of sorcerers* were listed some twenty page numbers. He sought the first, but it included an invocation to something called "bedgoblin," which he did not feel like performing just then. Instead he leafed through to the fifty-fourth page, where the third paragraph was headed *To cite a witch.*

"Take an unglazed earthen pot," began the instructions, and John Thunstone reached for a cylindrical clay vessel with a tight-fitting cover and an Indian pattern. From various containers in his desk drawers he measured in the substances called for in the formula. Finally he plugged in the connection of an electric grill, clamped the lid tightly on the clay cylinder, and set it upside down on the glowing wires. "Summon the sorcerer," he muttered, reading from the book.

Every audible word seemed to drain away one more drop of his strength. "Summon the sorcerer before me."

He turned to page 16:

When a Man or Beast is Plagued by Goblins or Ill-Disposed People

Go on Friday or Golden Sunday, ere the sun rise in the East, to a hazelnut bush. Cut a stick therefrom with a sympathetic weapon, by making three cuts above the hand toward the rise of the sun, in the name of . . .

Thunstone numbly congratulated himself in following these instructions some years before. His head swam, his eyes seemed oppressed by alternate flashes of light and blotches of gloom, but he staggered to the closet and groped in it for a package. Tearing away the wrapping of stout paper, he produced a rough-trimmed piece of hazel wood, the length and thickness of a walking stick. As his hand grasped its thicker end, he felt better, and turned toward the grill.

Vapor of some sort rose around his clay jar. In it he saw, or thought he saw, movement. As he walked toward that part of the room, his feet steadier and stronger, the moving object grew large and plain.

SOMEWHERE a man in a gray gown or robe was busy at a rough table. Thunstone saw him, like a dimly-cast image on a motion picture screen, bending over his work, his hands shifting here and there in nimble manipulation. On the table had been outlined a little figure at full length, a man of powerful proportions that might be copied after Thunstone's own. The gray-robed one held a sheaf of sharp metal slivers, thrusting their points, one by one, into the pictured arms, throat, body.

"A Shonokin," said Thunstone. "I thought that. And I thought he would be doing just what he is doing. Now—"

His big hand took a firmer grip of the hazel cane, and he stepped forward and swung it.

The wood swept into the cloud of vapor and the image there cast. It swished through, without seeming to disturb the misty cloud, and the figure in the gown sprang convulsively back from the table. A face came into view at the top of the gown, a face framed in longish black hair, with sharp fine features. The mouth opened as if to cry out, a hand lifted, and Thunstone struck through the vapor again.

The figure cowered. Its arms crossed in front of the face, trying to ward off an attack that must have seemed incomprehensible. The hands were frail and lean, and the third fingers longer than the middle fingers.

With increasing strength and precision, Thunstone lashed and smote. He saw the gowned body going down now, and poked it once, as with a sword-point. Finally he swept his stick at the reflected table-top and saw the slivers flying from their lodgments in the outlined body there. Stepping back, he turned off his electric grill. The vapor vanished instantly, and with it the images. Thunstone drew a deep, grateful breath of air. He was no longer weak, unsteady or blurred in his mind.

His first act was to open his pen-knife, cut a tally notch in the hazel stick. Carefully he rewrapped it, and carefully he stowed it away. A weapon that has defeated enchantment once is doubly effective in defeating it again—that is a commonplace of sorcery. He sat at the desk and from the top drawer drew the sheets of paper on which he was writing, as he found it out, all that could be said about the strange things called Shonokins.

"Their insistence upon an ancestry far more ancient and baleful than anything human may have a solid foundation of fact," wrote Thunstone. "Whenever paleontologists have probed the graves of the past on this continent as thoroughly as they have probed in Europe, perhaps remains of a species resembling man, though interestingly not man, may be turned up to support the Shonokin claims. More and more do I incline to believe that here in America once lived such things, developing their own culture and behavior—just as in Europe fifty thousand years ago lived the Neanderthal race, also non-human as we know humans (not that the first Shonokins were Neanderthaloid or like any other ancient manlike creature yet discovered in fossil).

"And, just as the Neanderthals were wiped out in some unthinkably desperate warfare with the first invading *homo sapiens,* so the ancestors of the Red Indian race must have swept away the fathers of the Shonokins—though not all of them. It would have been a war horrible beyond thought, with no sparing of vanquished enemies at the end. Somehow, a few survivors escaped, and our evidence is the existence of Shonokins today. How those beaten people lived, and where, cannot be even guessed until we learn from what place their modern children venture forth among us, in their avowed attempts to recover rule of their old domain.

"The Shonokin enchanments, or attempts at enchantments, I shall discuss at another place. What remains is to cite certain definite racial traits that set these interesting creatures apart from us as human beings. True, they resemble men at first glance. This may be deliberate imitation of some sort, and more may be said on this part of the subject when an unclad Shonokin is examined. Their heads, though habitually covered with long hair, perhaps in disguise, betray strange skull formations that betoken a brain not inferior to the human but of a much different shape. Here may be the basic reason for differences in Shonokin ethics and reactions to all things, physical and spiritual. Again, the third finger of the Shonokin hand is the longest, instead of the middle finger as with true men. To what remote ancestry this may trace is impossible to say, as even the lower beasts as we know them have in the forepaw a longer middle toe than—"

His telephone rang. It was the clerk at the desk. A gentleman wanted to see Mr. Thunstone. Might he come up?

"I'll come down," said Thunstone, rose and put away his unfinished manuscript. He left the suite, locked it carefully, and rode down in the elevator, whistling under his breath.

His visitor was lean, just shorter than Thunstone's own lofty self, and wore a long light coat and a pulled down hat. He bowed and held out a hand with a very long third finger. Thunstone failed, or pretended to fail, to see the hand.

"Come and sit in the lobby," he invited, and led the stranger to a brace of comfortable chairs in a far corner. They sat down. At once the Shonokin took off his hat and leaned his gaunt, fine face close to Thunstone.

"How much?" he demanded.

THUNSTONE leaned back, and from his pocket drew pipe and tobacco-pouch. He filled the pipe and lighted it. The Shonokin ducked his head sidewise in disgust.

"That filthy habit, learned from Amer-

ican savages!" he growled; and Thunstone remembered that tobacco mixed with herbs had been considered in old Indian days an incense to the Great Spirit and a near-fatal fumigation to evil beings. Had not Kalaspup—or Kwasind or Hiawatha, whatever his real name was—sat in enjoyment of the thick tobacco-fumes in the lodge, while his attackers, the water-goblins, turned sick and vomiting? Such evidence as he, Thunstone, uncovered tended more and more to prove that all monsters and devils of Indian legend were identifiable with the Shonokins.

"How much?" said his visitor again. "We know you well enough, Thunstone, to know that you are not a slave to money. But there are other things you value. Name them."

"You want to buy me off," replied Thunstone. "Is this an admission of defeat?"

"An admission of irritation," was the reply. "Being tormented by a stinging insect, which it is irksome to brush away, one spills honey in another place to attract it."

"My sting is not drawn as easily as that," Thunstone assured him. "Your journey is for nothing. Go back and tell that to the other Shonokins. Just now I am more than irritating. Haven't I seen two of you die?"

"No more of that!" The Shonokin lifted his left hand, its long third finger extended in what Thunstone judged to be a gesture averting ill omen. No Shonokin cares even to speak of the death of his own kind.

"You used magic against me," went on Thunstone, "magic so old as to be trite—poking and piercing my likeness. Men were successfully averting that sort of sympathetic hokus-pocus as long ago as Salem witchcraft days."

"It is not the extent of our power," was the harsh reply. "But you have not answered my question. Again, how much?"

"Again, you are wasting your time. Even a Shonokin's time must be worth something to himself. Good day."

THE strange-shaped left hand dipped into a pocket of the long coat.

"I make a last attempt, Thunstone. Here is something you will find interesting."

The hand reappeared. Between its fingertips was a great glitter of light.

"Jewels? I do not even wear them," said Thunstone, but then his eyes were fixed on the thing.

He saw it was no jewel he knew. For an instant he fancied it was a bit of phosphorescence, or some sort of lamp—but no lamp, no phosphorus, gleaned like that. It's glare possessed his whole vision, seemed to beat through his eyes and pierce his skull behind them. Like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he was blinded; like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he could not look away.

"Rise," the Shonokin said, "and come with me."

Thunstone leaned in the direction of the voice, and blew out all the tobacco smoke in his lungs.

A cry, terrible and strangled, rang in his very ears, and the light seemed to flash off. There was an abrupt clink on the floor, as though a half-dollar had dropped, and he sat up, alone. The tobacco smoke hung in the air around him, a little blue misty swaddling through which he saw two figures—the scurrying long-coated Shonokin, the approaching hotel manager.

Thunstone put the pipe back in his mouth, shutting his eyes a moment to cleanse them of their blur. He would have smiled, but decided not to. The manager was questioning him.

"What happened to that man, Mr. Thunstone?"

"He was taken suddenly ill," replied Thunstone. "It's really nothing for us to worry about."

"You're all right?"

"I'm all right," nodded Thunstone.

The manager's eyes dropped floorward. "Careful! You dropped a coal from your pipe—step on it."

Thunstone, too, glanced down to a little crumb of radiance paler and brighter than any tobacco fire. "No, don't. That's a piece of cut-glass jewelry—rather skillful cutting and polishing—I'll take care of it."

He whipped the handkerchief from his breast pocket, dropped it over the glaring object and gathered it up in his big hand.

"You've cut your finger," said the manager. "There's a spot of blood on your handkerchief."

"Not my blood," Thunstone told him, "but this thing needs careful handling." With the cambric-swaddled lump still in

his hand, he levered his bulk out of the chair. "I think I'll have dinner in my suite this evening. What's good?"

AGAIN in his sitting room, Thunstone laid a china plate on his desk. Then he chose a drinking glass from the tray beside his carafe, and struck match after match, painstakingly smudging its interior. Finally he flipped the gleaming thing upon the plate and quickly covered it with the dulled glass. He was able to look at it then without agony to his eyes.

The object was the size of an almond, smoothly curved on its entire surface. Not a single facet could he detect. But its light, even though impeded by the soot on the glass, was steady and strong. He drew his shades and turned out the electric lights in the room. Still it shone, illuminating objects to the farthest walls. Inside the object was some source of radiance, steady and insistent and intense.

Muffling it still more by dropping his handkerchief over the upturned glass, Thunstone sat back, smoked and thought. After some minutes, he took up his telephone and called a number which he did not have to look up.

The woman who answered was tremendously interested in the questions Thunstone asked, and had many questions of her own. Thunstone evaded the necessity of direct replies, and finally when she recommended another informant thanked her and hung up. His second call was long distance to Boston, where a retired professor of American folklore greeted him warmly as an old friend and gave him further, more specific information, finally naming a book.

"I have that book right here," said Thunstone. "And I should have thought of the reference without bothering you. Thanks and let's see each other soon. I may have about half of a story to tell you."

He hung up again, and went to his shelf. The book he chose was slim and green, like a cheap textbook. It was John M. Taylor's *Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut*, published in 1908 as an item of the Grafton Historical Series.

Almost idly Thunstone leafed through the restrained but fascinating account of a multiple charge of diabolism and its evidence and trial, almost forgotten today though it made grim history full thirty years before the more familiar Salem incidents. Chapter 10 began with notes on the trial of Goodwife Knapp in New Haven during May of 1654, a trial that included evidence by a dozen neighbors and ended with the defendant's death on the gallows. But it was not the adventures of Goodwife Knapp so much as those of a witness, Mary Staple, Staplyes, or Staplies, that drew Thunstone's attention:

> . . . she, ye said Knapp, voluntarily, without any occasion given her, said that goodwife Staplyes told her, the said Knapp, than an Indian brought vnto her, the said Staplyes, two little things brighter then the light of the day, and told the said goodwife Staplyes they were Indian gods, as the Indian called ym; and the Indian withall told her, the said Staplyes, if she would keep them, she would be so big rich, all one god, and that the said Staplyes told the said Knapp, she gaue them again to the said Indian, but she could not tell whether she did so or no.

Thunstone savored the quaint spelling and syntax as he read. ". . . so big rich, all one god . . ." What did that mean? He turned two more pages, the evidence of one Goodwife Sherwood, and a story set down at fourth hand—the same story as before:

> . . . goodwife Baldwin whispered her in the eare and said to her that goodwife Knapp told her that a woman in ye towne was a witch and would be hanged within a twelue moneth, and would confess herselfe a witch and cleere her that she was none, and that she asked her how she knew she was a witch, and she told her she had received Indian gods of an Indian, wch are shining things, wch shine lighter then the day. Then this depont asked goodwife Knapp if she had said so, and she denyed it; goodwife Baldwin affirmed that she did, but Knapps wife againe denyed it and said she knowes no woman in the towne that is a witch, nor any woman that hath received Indian gods, but she said there was an Indian

at a womans house and offerred her a coople of shining things, but the woman neuer told her she took them, but was afraide and ran away . . .

There was more beyond of Mary Staplies. The book called her a "light woman," shrewd and shrewish, who spoke in Goodwife Knapp's defense. Later she too was on trial and released, and her husband sued her accusers. She did not sound timid, by all accounts, yet on her own showing she had run fearfully from the "Indian" who offered her something shining brighter than daylight.

"Shonokins look like Indians," muttered Thunstone, "if you do not notice their third fingers."

He took time to feel sorry for the Puritan elders, not versed in demonology and not even well versed in grammar or law, who were faced with whatever faced them three hundred years ago.

Well, then: The wife of a New England colonist had fled refusing from a bright talisman that would make her "big rich." He, Thunstone, was in possession of such a thing. The Shonokin had fled this time, losing his charm—or had he? Was this, perhaps, a device to make Thunstone accept a bribe or wage?

Thunstone laid down the book and raised the handkerchief. There was a fleck of blood on it, as the manager had said; and on the dish, too, seeping from under the imprisoning glass. Within, the shining object seemed to float, like a gleaming bit of ice on a dark sea.

Thunstone took from a cabinet some chemical vessels, tubes and flasks of liquid. Carefully he secured a portion of the blood, diluted it, made frowning tests. He wound up shaking his head over the precipitation in his solution.

Blood, yes. Mammalian, surely. Human, no. What creature could be matched with that blood he could not say. Perhaps no scientist could say. He felt his eyes drawn again to the thing under the glass.

It was no longer a jewel, or anything like a jewel. In the little wallow of blood lay a skull the size of his thumb, pallid instead of glaring, its cranium shaped strangely, bulging here and pinched in there. Its black eye-sockets seemed to meet his gaze and challenge it. Its wee, perfect jawbone stirred on its hinge, and two rows of perfect, pointed little teeth parted, then snicked together as if in hunger or menace.

THUNSTONE watched, as closely as when the Shonokin had first dipped the mystery from his pocket, but with all his defenses, mental and spiritual, up. Skulls of any size and shape must not frighten him, he decided. And—his memory flashed back to the Indian tales of Kalaspup—magical skulls had been employed before this by Shonokins against mankind, and had been defeated.

It was only the size of a thumb, anyway. No, a trifle larger, the size of an egg. A big egg. And the glass that covered it was smaller than Thunstone had thought, the skull-appearance crowded it.

As Thunstone gazed, the jawbone moved, the teeth gnashed, a second time. The movement stirred the glass, tilted and upset it. The glass rolled to the floor, broke with a muffled clash of fragments. The egg-sized skull was suddenly orange size. Its sockets were no longer dark but glowed greenly, as with some sort of phosphorescent rot. With a waggle of its jawbone it hunched itself from the plate, a little nearer to Thunstone. Yet again its teeth, big enough to show their pointed formation, snapped hungrily.

Thunstone argued with himself that worse things than this had come to him in the past, that a skull so small would be easily crushed—but already it was bigger, bigger still. It flipped over, rolled from the table, swam through the air at him. As it snapped its jaws, he batted it away, palm outward, as if playing handball. The thing was as cold as a flying snowball, and as he deflected it, it almost sank its sharp teeth into his finger. It struck a wall, bounced and caromed back, so that he ducked only just in time. The wall where it had touched so briefly bore a spatter of blood. On its new course the skull flew into the bedroom, and Thunstone pulled the door shut.

At once something was bumping, shoving, demanding entrance to the parlor. The panels of the door creaked, but held. The blows grew heavier, more insistent. Was

the thing growing still more—would it grow and grow, to the size of a boulder, a table, a house? Thunstone, eyes on the closed door, mustered his wits for something new in defense. He thought quickly of the Connecticut visitation of terror, of witnesses at the witch-trials who had spoken of enchantments that smacked of hypnotism or hallucination and of grimmer things—"firy eies" with no head to contain them, and a brief glimpse of something "with a great head and wings and noe boddy and all black." Well, if Shonokins had not triumphed there, they would not triumph here.

The knockings had ceased, and there was a questing flash of light at the lower chink of the door, then something began slowly to pour out.

Thunstone thought at first it was some slow, pale-grey liquid, but it held its shape. The forepart of a flat, ugly skate or ray sometimes steals into view like that from hiding in shallow water—a blunt point like a nose, a triangle of pale tissue as flat as though hammered down. This trembled a bit, as if exploring the air by smell or feel. It came out more, and more.

IT WAS not a flattened skull, for bone would have splintered; but had a skull been modeled in softness, then pressed as thin as paper, it might be like that. It still had a jointed jaw, the semblance of needle teeth, and eye-sockets that looked up at Thunstone with a deep glow. The glow was more knowledgable than menacing. Thunstone saw no sign of the effort to terrify which characterizes most attacks by things natural or supernatural. It thought it had him, and that there would be little or no trouble about doing what it wanted to do with him. Those flattened jaws opened, and he could see the inner bare bones of them.

It slid out, out, thin and broad as a bathmat. Thunstone's great hand fell on the back of a chair, and he brought this forward, as a trainer offers a chair to a truculent lion in a cage. The teeth closed on a hardwood leg and bit off the tip of it like a bit of celery. A little waggle of the flat muzzle cleared away the splinters. With a sort of protozoic surge, it began to clear of the chink under the floor. Its forepart swelled as if to regain its skull-shape, a shape that would be larger than a bushel.

There was a door behind Thunstone, a door to the outer corridor; but Thunstone does not run from evil. He knows that others have turned their backs, and what has happened to those others. He tossed the whole chair for the teeth to catch and mangle, dropped back as far as the closet and made a quick snatching motion inside for an ebony cane. With this he thrust, swordsmanslike, at the enemy, and thought it checked—perhaps because the ferrule of the stick was of silver, abhorrent to black magic. He gained a moment to grab with his other hands at the bookshelf and throw books like stones at the thing.

THOSE were valuable books, some of them irreplacable, others old friends that had nourished his mind and stood his allies in moments almost as unlucky as this. Thunstone felt like cursing as the skull, now lifting itself three-dimensional against the bedroom door, caught in its mouth and ripped to shreds a first edition of Thompson's *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic*. Spence's heavy *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, enough to smash a skull, bounced impotently from the misshapen brain-case. The thing was lifting now, lifting into the air in a slow, languid flight, like a filling balloon, to drift toward him. Its jaw dropped, exposing a mouth that could take his head at one gulp.

"Not this time!" Thunstone defied it, in a voice he wished was not so hysterical, and threw yet another book. This came open as it flew through the air, smiting the noseless face and dropping on its back, widespread, just in front.

The skull, too, dropped back and down. Thunstone could have sworn that its facebones writhed, like frightened flesh. It seemed to turn away.

He stood there, breathing as if from labors that had exhausted even his giant body, and saw it sag, spread, flatten. It wanted to creep back the way it had come.

"No!" he yelled at it again, and, stooping, caught the edge of the carpet. Frantically he bundled the skull and the book together.

It took both his brawny hands to hold

.hat package together, for what was inside .hrashed and churned as convulsively as a great cat in a bag. Thunstone hung on, it was all he could do, and brought his thick knee into play, bearing down. That skull had grown so large and abhorrent—but not quite to bushel size. It was more pumpkin size now—or did he imagine it was like a football, the size of an ordinary human head? It still strove and wallowed, straining for freedom. A human head of those dimensions would be dwarfed, really; perhaps a child's; perhaps a monkey's.

"It's shrinking," he growled exultantly. "Trying to get out that way."

Now it did not struggle at all, or it was too small to make its struggles felt. Thunstone clung to his improvised trap, counting to thirty, and dared to let the fabric fall open.

The skull was gone. The blinding bright jewel was there, in a fold of the rug as far removed as possible from the still open book.

Thunstone smiled. Deliberately and with all his strength, he set his heel upon the glow and ground down. He felt disintegration, as of very old fire-weakened brick. A whiff of bad odor came up, and was gone. The glow departed, and when he took away his foot, there was a blood-stain and nothing more.

Breathing deeply once again, Thunstone picked up the book. It was his *Egyptian Secrets* that, earlier in the day, had shown him a way to another victory. By some chance it had fallen open to the sixty-second page:

A Most Excellent Protection

Write the following letters upon a scrap of paper:

Thunstone read them, a passage so seasoned with holy names that it might have been a prayer instead of a spell. And, finally:

> Only carry the paper with you; and you will then perceive that no enchantment can remain in the room with you.

Thunstone closed the book, then reopened it to the quaint preface which promised that "to him who properly esteems and values this book, and never abuses its teachings, will not only be granted the usefulness of its contents, but he will also attain everlasting joy and blessing." The thought came that to some scholars such tomes of power were considered in themselves to be evil. But is not every weapon what the wielder makes it? He decided to disallow the element of chance in the falling open of *Egyptian Secrets* to the very passage that had won his late struggle.

Someone was knocking at the door. Thunstone started violently, then recovered himself.

"Yes?"

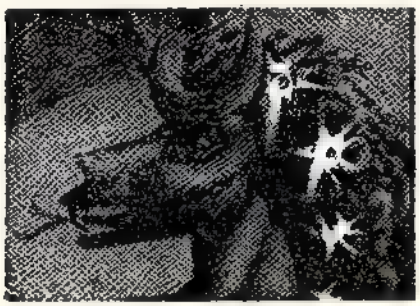
"Room service, Mr. Thunstone. You said you'd be dining in your suite?"

"Not for three-quarters of an hour," said Thunstone. "I'll telephone down."

"Right." The man outside was walking away.

Thunstone poured himself a drink from a bottle of brandy. It tingled in his throat. Then he stripped off his jacket, rolled the sleeves back from his broad forearms, and from the bathroom fetched a broom, towels and a pail of water.

Beginning the task of cleaning his own room, he whistled a tune to himself, a tune old and cheerful. And when he had finished whistling it, he whistled it all over again. He had never felt better in his life.



Welcome Home!

By CHARLES KING

"COME forth *Abrimanes* . . . come forth *Zamiel* . . . come forth *Sammael* . . . come forth *Belial*. . . ."

On and on droned the emotionless voice that seemed to have been spawned from some dank sepulchre. The invocation to the Dark Angel continued, punctuated only by the occasional sharp intakes of breath of the straining spectators.

"Come forth *Abaddon* . . . come forth *Apollyon* . . . come forth—" and so on

Reading by BORIS DOLGOV

It takes more than a little time to shake off previously preserved witch fancies and superstitions

screamed weakly as a dim, formless shape whisked over us for an instant, and was gone.

Another shape, and still another, fled noiselessly over our heads. The short moans that had escaped the assemblage at odd intervals now became more frequent . . . swelled into a gruesome counterpoint to the vocal mad melody of the Invocator.

Faster and faster slewed the shapes above us . . . sharper and sharper grew the uncontrolled crises about me . . . and then my flashlight sent its inquisitive beam along the floor. In that one instant I'd seen enough. My free hand crept toward the wall-switch above me and flicked it. Bathed in yellow light, the room revealed its occupants.

A tight, strained group that looked straight ahead with unseeing eyes. Almost tangible in its blanketing effect, the Terror of just a moment ago still clung heavily to them. Only the Invocator seemed unchained by the spell she'd invoked. Her eyes were fixed upon me . . . glaring with anger. So I spoke quickly:

"Show's over, folks . . . another phony exposed!"

With a screech the old hell-cat bounded across the floor. I caught her in time to keep her raking nails from exploring my face.

"Stop sitting around like fools! Take a look underneath that table!"

My sharp command seemed to release the others from their lethargy. As in a dream they arose and wandered loosely over to the table at which the squalling, old Invocator had been sitting.

"Well? What do you see?"

One shocked voice made answer: "Raised buttons on the floor—"

"Exactly," and here I had to tighten my grip on the furious old woman whose spittle was running down her cursing mouth, "Exactly! Those buttons controlled the movements of the shapes that so frightened you. They were suspended from wires. . . ."

"But . . . but . . ."

"I know You're wondering about the real, unmistakable terror that gripped you —that paralyzed you. You were sold a very solid bill of goods."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at it this way," I explained. "This old crone, I'm still holding, represents herself as a Witch; claims to have direct contact with those of the Nether World. For a fee she promises to prove same. Well, whether you like it or not, you are half-inclined to believe her—maybe because of the delicious terror involved . . . *Ouch!*"

I WIPED away the trickle of blood from the side of my cheek where the old she-devil had finally succeeded in sideswiping me. I thrust her away from me, threw her a few *lira notes,* and swept my friends out of the house. Later, in my own diggings, we dragged out some of the local *vino* and gave it a good play. I was at the window admiring the awesome grandeur of the brooding Alps when a voice recalled me to my duties as spook-buster.

"Carry on with your explanation, Jules. You were saying that we half-invited the old girl's atmosphere—and that we half-believed her before she started."

"Well, didn't you? Didn't the group of you *insist* on trotting over for a seance, even though I'd warned you that there are no such things as ghosts, succuba, wraiths, lemures or anything else that fake mediums batten on. . . ."

"But, Jules—"

"Let me finish. All of you know that I've been traipsing around the world for years exposing just such quackery as we sat through tonight. As a kid I got too damn many scares in the small Pennsylvania Dutch town where I was born. I spent too many sleepless nights, scared almost to death, because some old fool filled my ears with mystico nonsense. . . ."

"So you devoted yourself to the breaking down of all those who claim to *know* that such things exist. You've incessantly chased down rumors from Translyvania to Transjordania . . . but we know all that—"

"Then why don't you see for yourself that people will never be free of mumbo-jumbo —and those crooks who exploit it—if you calmly and completely fall for as amateurish a setting of auto-suggestion and hocus-pocus as we all saw performed for us tonight?"

Hot? You're darn right I was hot. In my own way I'd made some sort of reputation in my capacity as witch-breaker, or anything else you want to call me. My monographs on the subject had been widely translated and

distributed. And now, in Italy where I'd gone to vacation with a few friends, I'd had to work just as hard to convince these supposedly intellectual people as those ancient die-hards, who still buried rinds, animal hearts, and other assorted garbage, under a full moon. Was all my work for nothing? Were people so perverse or stupid that they needed *individual* convincing? It was all very disappointing. . . .

"Don't take it so hard, Jules. We believe you. Really, we do. It's just that . . ."

"Cut it," I grunted, "I'm tired of people telling me that it takes a little time to shake off preciously preserved fancies and superstitions. It's nothing more than romantic foolishness—kid stuff."

LATER . . . when I was alone . . . I was sorry for the tirade I'd subjected my friends to. After all, they were no worse than others. Gullible, always on the lookout for new thrills, ready to be intimidated and fleeced—but that was their business. What I needed was a vacation from the sorry business I'd selected as my life work. I toyed with the idea until I'd convinced myself. I hadn't been home since my Mother had died, some ten years before. So I cabled my Father.

The notion conceived, the plan was put into action. It took very little time to make my good-bys, pack my bags and board a steamer homeward. The trip was uneventful, most of my time being spent at the ship's bar where the bartender was properly congenial and silent by turn.

And then the slow, majestic passage, accompanied by hootings, whistles and bravely grunting tugs as we eased past the Statue of Liberty toward a Manhattan pier. By this time I was so eager for my long unseen Father and home town, that I stopped for just one quickie at the Hotel Pennsylvania bar and then made for the Pennsylvania Station itself just a few yards away.

All through the night my thoughts kept in rhythm with the clacking wheels. I was too excited to sleep. Yes, the nearer I got to the little Pennsylvania Dutch town that had been my home, the more I realized how I needed its slow pace, its drowsy quiet.

Hours of patience were rewarded by the coming of morning. I was too pent up to eat . . . just made a quick toilet and waited. And then, and then at long last, the great chain of cars slid into my station. I tossed my bags onto the siding and vaulted after them.

I had sent a telegram ahead to my Father, but he wasn't at the station. I reflected that the years were catching up with him and he was probably still in bed. In that case, I thought, it would be better to eat at the local hotel and disturb the old man's repose as little as possible. It would also give me a welcome chance to look about the town and see if it had changed.

The walk to the single hotel the town boasted afforded me great happiness. I now knew my stay would be one of maundering peace . . . for everything was the same. There were the sleepy little stores, companionably slumbering with their proprietors through the years . . . there were the frugal and pious Amish and Mennonites bringing their farm wares to the Square. . . .

"GOOD morning to ye, stranger," placidly announced the wrinkled hotel clerk.

"Good morning to you, too—but I am not a stranger."

Wrinkles dissolved, coagulated and then made room for additional ones as the weighty problem was wrestled with. Then, "No . . . cannot say I recall ye. . . ."

"Shame on you," I scolded, "has Jules Swartz' son changed so much in ten years that his old friends no longer know him?"

It is nice to be remembered by acquaintances of the past . . . I confess it does pleasant things to the ego . . . but I was completely unprepared for what followed.

"You . . . you are *really* Jules Swartz' son?"

"That is what I have just told you."

"You haven't been home since your Mother died?"

"That is also true."

The old man was so intent on getting his words out that he practically stuttered them: "And . . . and didn't ye leave town at an early age?"

This was getting monotonous. I don't usually take to questions about my doings. But, I reflected, there was certainly no harm in answering the garrulous old man. It

would, possibly, give him some welcome gossip to retail during the day.

"Yes, I left home at an early age, coming back just once in a while for visits. . . ."

"And d'ye remember what your Mother died of?"

Now I was downright annoyed. So I determined to ruffle the feathers of this talkative old male hen. "You probably know that better than I do myself, my inquisitive host. I was in Mexico when I got the letter about her succumbing to heart failure. But, of course, if *you* know better. . . ."

My obvious sarcasm was just as obviously wasted. Taught me a good lesson, too. This was the last time I'd ever bandy words with hotel clerks grown moronic with age. His next words were the convincer:

"Maybe I do know better . . . maybe I do. . . ."

That was quite enough. Bags in hand, I swung out the front door and away before my homecoming could be soured by a loquacious old loon. The good, clean air reminded me that I was hungry and my eye caught a red-painted combination bar and lunchroom at the further corner. I'd never seen it before. Definitely an innovation in town.

It was clean enough inside, and I was soon wolfing down a generous platter of eggs and bacon. The coffee was surprisingly good and I said as much to the lone man running the place. He grinned.

"Glad somebody around here appreciates the stuff—most've them complain it's too strong."

"That's the way I like it."

"Me, too, stranger."

"I'm not exactly a stranger. That is, I was born in this town and I'm returning to visit my Father."

"That's nice. Who is he?"

"Jules Swartz. I've the same name. . . ."

"Oh!"

HALFWAY to my mouth the coffee-cup suddenly halfted. A few drops spilled onto the counter. Then, slowly, carefully, I set the cup down. That "Oh" had been too sharply accented; too full of provocative meaning. And I was getting more than a little weary of having people shy in a startled way at mention of my Father or myself.

"Tell me," and I was making my voice as steady as possible, "just why everybody, so far, acts as if there were a bad smell around when I mentioned *Jules Swartz.*"

He carefully wiped the counter with a damp rag before he spoke. It was easy to see that he was a type who thought long and hard before answering a question which might prove serious. He was marshalling his words.

Then:

"I haven't been in this town long, Str—uh—Mr. Swartz. Personally, I don't *know* anything."

"But you've heard, eh?"

"Yeah . . . I've heard."

"What?"

"Oh, you know how folks rattle along in a town like this. . . ."

"I ought to know. That was what originally made me run away. Pennsylvania Dutch and morbid mysticism seem to make a steady team. . . ."

"That's kind of what I mean, Mr. Swartz. With the job I got, and with people in and out of here all the time, I just can't help hearing things—picking things up."

"Tell me."

"Remember it ain't what *I* say. . . ."

Impatience clawed at me. "I know . . . I know . . . you're only repeating what you've heard. . . ."

"That's right."

I could have cheerfully throttled him. "Go on—"

And then it came.

"People keep disappearin'!"

"Really? You mean townspeople?"

"Nope. People passin' through. Salesmen, tourists and such. . . ."

"But what has that got to do with my Dad?"

"Well . . . there was your Mother too. . . ."

He jumped back, slamming himself against the wall back of the counter, as my hand curved toward him.

"Hey! I'm only repeatin' what you *wanted* me to tell you!"

I listened to the violent pumping of my heart; looked at my trembling hand. "Better set up a drink. No. Make it a couple—one for each of us."

Wordless, he splashed a couple of ryes into tumblers. We soundlessly toasted each

other and then threw the fiery stuff down fast.

"Let's kill another round!"

"I guess we better had, Mr. Swartz."

Soothed by the strong liquor I lit a cigarette, and was pleased to see that my hands were almost normal again. "Go on . . . I may as well hear all of it."

He looked at me carefully, and then, apparently reassured by what he saw, "Well, folks claim that your Mother didn't die of heart failure. . . ."

"What do they claim?"

"They say—uh—she knocked herself off!"

"Suicide?"

"Yeah."

"But . . . but why?"

"There was those people supposed to have disappeared—"

I gripped the counter edge until my fingers hurt badly. "Man! Stop torturing me! What about those people?"

"They say . . . I hear . . . those folks were last seen at *your house!*"

INSUFFERABLE beasts! Ignorant, vicious, scandal-mongering savages! The same tongues, pregnant with old-world fear and prejudice, that had driven me to leave the town, had slain my saintly Mother. Those tongues, with the precision of probing knives, had dug her grave and then plagued her into it. I had run away from it. She had stayed, fought her battle . . . and lost.

"I . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Swartz."

"They . . . my parents . . . were still taking in tourists, weren't they?"

"Yeah. People that couldn't find accommodations at the hotel used to go to your place. Seemed to be an agreement between the hotel and your folks."

There always had been. The good ground provides food, but money is always scarce to a small-town farmer. We'd taken in many boarders and transients in the past. The extra few dollars had always been more than welcome.

"But the hotel stopped sendin' people over some time ago."

I awoke from my perusal of the past. Those words meant we were now getting to the heart of the matter.

"You mean . . . after my Mother died?"

"No—before. It was soon after the hotel owner told your folks that it . . . it happened."

"How . . . how is my Father?"

He coughed slightly. "Haven't seen much of him, lately."

"You mean since my Mother . . ."

"Yeah."

That was why the broken-hearted old man hadn't met me at the station. He'd been too proud to run the cruel gauntlet of eyes and tongues that would inevitably follow him; and too kind to include my company in his and force me to share his sad sorrow. It had happened anyway. My informant's voice rode into my reverie again.

"I'm a sort of a Johnny-come-lately in this town, myself. Don't hold with the way people think. . . ."

It was easy to see that he was embarrassed. With true decency, he didn't want to intrude. I made it easier for him: "I certainly agree with you, my friend."

He brightened a little, at that. "What I mean is I always liked your people. Whenever they came in here for a bite to eat they were nice to me . . . polite . . . lots politer than the rest. . . ."

I nearly cried at that. In his honest, straight-forward way he wanted to help. I motioned him to continue.

"You're the son," he blurted red-faced, "maybe there's somethin' *you* can do. Your Mother's gone, but your Father has a right to live out his days in peace."

There was only one thing to do, and I did it. I shook his hand in mine. The sort of handshake that goes on between two men who would be shamed by spoken words of gratitude, and who must express themselves in silent fashion.

I certainly *could* do something. This was, after all, the job that I was used to doing . . . had been doing. I'd succeeded in laying macabre myths low all over the world; had convinced divers people, certainly as hard-headed and opinionated as lived in this town, of the intellectual futility of their basically banal beliefs. Yes . . . this was indeed *my* job; to help my Mother rest in peace, and my Father *live* in peace.

"Where is your telephone?"

He pointed to the enclosed booth in the

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corner. I changed a couple of bills for a handful of silver. My call to New York went through rapidly and a few minutes was all I needed. There was delighted agreement on the other side. I hung up feeling ineffably better.

"Thanks again," I mentioned on my way out, "you've been very good to me; helped a great deal."

I DECIDED to walk out to my Father's place. It wasn't very far . . . and would also keep me from getting into any more cankerous conversation with the spectre-stricken villagers. Peace closed in upon me as I strode along. The grass along the winding dirt road smelled sweetly, and the great, gnarled trees dropped their heavy-laden branches as if in benediction. It wasn't long after that I pushed open the small gate that led to the home that I'd been born in, and my Father before me. My first feeling was one of misgiving. Clearly, the place was going to seed. That it was unattended was given mute evidence by wildly sprouting weeds, and corn that was dying upon the stalk. Dark depression threatened my new-found peace.

Outside the house, I forbore entering for a moment. I wanted to compose myself in spirit as well as in countenance. This was done . . . and I entered.

The creaking rocking-chair in the corner halted its steady motion.

"Welcome home, son."

I stood still for the space of a breath, then rushed forward. My cheeks were wet as my arms went around the old man. His body that had been so strong . . . so erect . . . now bent and thin; his voice . . . now so . . . weak . . . lonely. . . .

"Father. You look grand!"

"Do I, son?" He smiled. A smile so sad that I threw my plan of slow attack to the winds.

"Don't you worry, Father. I heard enough in town, this morning, to know how you've been pilloried and wronged. And I'm going . . ."

"Please." His thin, blue-veined hand moved slowly in protest. "Please, son, I would rather forget."

"Don't worry. I'm not thinking of any nonsensical revenge. I'm only interested in

restoring your good name to the community that should be proud of having you one of them; and, incidentally, to forestall the future blighting of anyone's life through maliciousness and godless stupidity."

"No, my boy . . . you mustn't."

"But—"

An angry red streaked the old man's worn face. His fists clenched . . . unclenched. . . .

"I say you mustn't!"

Without conceit, the old man must have known of my reputation in my chosen field. Surely my Mother must have shown him the letters and newspaper clippings I'd sent to her. I would have liked to accede to his apparently earnest wish, but . . .

"It's too late, Father."

"Too late?"

"Yes. I've already telephoned friends of mine—a married couple—to come up here and help me disprove this nonsense."

His voice was so low that I could hardly catch them. "Too . . . late. . . ."

"But surely," I hurried on, "you must realize that it's not only for *your* good . . . there are countless others destined to be unfairly persecuted unless this thing is nipped short."

MY WORRY changed almost to joy as, for the first time, a peacefulness came into his face. Well, no. Not a peacefulness, precisely. Rather, a look of absolute relaxation. As if the tormenting burden had slipped off his thin shoulders.

"Are they good friends of your's?"

This was something that I could sink my teeth into: "Yes, Father, the very best. They are literary people, both well-known and respected writers. Their magazine articles are widely read, and if *they* write the truth about this place—a truth which I am going to unalterably establish—then good old common sense will, once and for all, take the place of haunted fear."

He looked at me a while, the effect of complete relaxation more and more apparent.

"Yes . . . it has to be."

I locked my arm in his. "Come. Let us explore the old place. It's been too long since I've seen it."

"Too long."

Mentally I cursed myself for staying away

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so many years. Indeed, the saddening events of the morning proved, beyond doubt, that I had been away too long. It hadn't been right to let the old man forage for himself . . . stand alone before the slings and arrows. . . .

The rooms were the unmistakable stamp of not having been lived in. They had no welcoming warmth, gave off no aura save loneliness. I forced some brightness into my voice: "How about a peek into the attic, Father. What old keepsakes have you added since last time?"

"I'd rather we didn't go there, son."

Something stirred inside me. "Why?"

"Your Mother's things are up there. I . . . I don't . . ."

Relief surged through in gusty waves. "Then I'll go alone. Please believe me. I understand."

How the old man must have loved her. Alone in the attic, I looked about at the pictures, clothes, needlework . . . in fact, anything the house contained that was representative of my Mother was before me. And everything was clean, dusted, showing the loving attention of his hands that were tireless in their devotion. Only for himself he no longer cared. But all that would change. After my friends and myself had exploded the rotten bubble that hovered over this town I would stay with my Father, leave him no more. Together we would . . . and I shuddered from head to toe as a reedy scream tore through the house and into my heart.

I clattered into the hall and took the stairs several at a time in a wild descent to the floor below. But someone else had preceded me down those same stairs. He lay at the foot of them, on his stomach, but his neck so badly cracked and twisted that his sightless eyes stared right up into mine. My Father.

WITHIN an hour I had the body removed to the undertaker parlor. In no uncertain terms I let the gaping fools know that it was accidental death. It had been too easy to probe into their miserable minds and see the word "suicide" framed therein. So I spoke first, and then shouldered my way past the brutish, inquisitive faces into the open air.

Back I went, to the farm, to await the guests who could help no longer.

Wait! But they could! After the fervent protestations I'd made to my poor Father I'd be less than a man not to try to help the others I'd mentioned. Others, who were doomed to lives blighted by whispers unless I ripped out the roots of fecund unreason.

So I waited.

Steps coming up the porch warned me that my friends had arrived. As I rose to my feet I controlled my features, but, one look at theirs, told me they'd already been apprised of what happened. Wagging tongues . . . wagging tongues . . . ceaseless . . . remorseless. . . .

Lila drew my head down to her's and kissed me. Her calm, lovely voice soothed me, lulled me:

"We were told, Jules, by the man who taxied us up here."

Jim didn't say anything for the moment. He just gripped my hand, letting his feeling friendship run strong and true from him to me.

They were my friends. My best friends.

Later, we were sitting and smoking about the fire I'd stirred in the grate. None of us had felt very hungry, just managed to swallow a few mouthfuls. I'd told them the whole sorry story and, more and more, had revelled in the thought that Providence had blessed me with such wonderfuly commiserate friendship.

"You're absolutely right, Jules," stated Lila, "we must go through with your plan."

Jim had also given his opinion in his slow, thoughtful way. "Lila is quite right, Jules. What you are going to do is fine in concept and tremendously thoughtful in regard to humanity. You're a good man."

How I warmed to them. "Just a couple of nights of sleeping here will be quite enough to turn the trick. And, speaking of sleeping, it's time you were off. You'll find your room upstairs. . . ."

"How about you, Jules?"

"I'll be along directly."

ALONE, I sat and brooded. Recalled events from my childhood; thought of my dear Mother and Father. The hours sped by silently and unnoticed. It was a casual look at my wrist-watch that told me how late it was. Midnight.

It was another casual look that broke the

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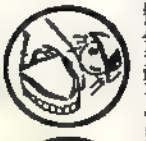

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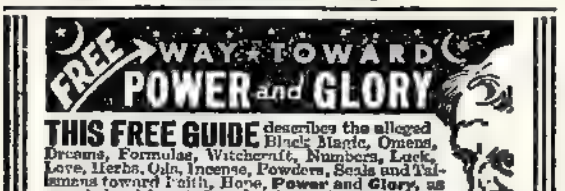

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back of the mystery . . . and logically explained what had transpired.

The hall-mirror was cobwebbed and unclean. I turned away and sat down before the fire again. Once again I let my thoughts range into the past. Now, however, events explained themselves with astonishing clarity.

My Mother *had* committed suicide. She, too, had found out and had been unable to survive her knowledge.

My Father? Well, I now understood—too well—why he'd asked if my friends were *good* friends. I understood why he'd parrotted the words "too late" after me. Not once . . . but twice.

And why the old man had repeated "too long" after me. His meaning had been diametrically different from mine. He'd striven . . . you can't take it away from him . . . he'd striven to keep the secret from me. But I had forced him . . . forced him. . . .

Then, when he saw that it was indeed "too late" and "too long," he'd relaxed and let his burden slide from him . . . to me.

Yes . . . he, too, had committed suicide. It was the only thing to do. He couldn't face me once I had found out the truth. This, also, I well understood.

Well, it was time, and I was being called, so I got up. I took another look at the grime-covered mirror, well aware of what it would tell me. My trained mind might reject it, but my eyes—and my *ego—couldn't!*

I looked down at my hands, the fingers of which had extended into serpentine length and which writhed and twisted with complete disregard for bone structure. I looked at the black tufts of hair that dotted them. I looked at my face . . . my face . . . which had become abnormally larger . . . which had become pitted with tiny round pools of excrescence . . . at the double rows of hooked teeth that pushed themselves a distance past my livid lips. . . .

I was hungry.

I stalked silently up the stairs, until I came to the closed door behind which my friends were sleeping. I didn't touch the knob. I knew I didn't have to. I effortlessly passed through the door, itself, and began enjoying my Father's heritage. . . .

Arkham House

PERHAPS we are more than ordinarily enthusiastic about the various fine fantasy volumes coming out of Arkham House because many of the collected stories first appeared in WEIRD TALES. But judged by any standards such books as Donald Wandrei's "The Eye and the Finger," Dr. Henry Whitehead's "Jumbee," C. A. Smith's "Lost Worlds," and H. P. Lovecraft's "Marginalia" make for fine entertainment. We enjoyed them as we know did thousands of others.

The history and growth of Arkham House, creation of August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, makes an interesting record. Starting out as an idea and a name—"Arkham" from H. P. Lovecraft's name for Salem in his Mythos tales—Arkham House has weathered some tough early sledding, paper-limitation snags (don't we know!) and the loss of co-director Don Wandrei to the Army, leaving "major-domo" August Derleth to carry on alone.

Derleth is, as if you didn't know, a fine and established writer of ever-increasing stature. WEIRD TALES values him not only as a true friend of long standing but as one of its best-known and best-liked contributors. Too, he is literary editor of one of the large mid-western papers, contributes regularly to a dozen "big-time" magazines besides turning out a couple of books a year. (He's already written 30!) Still, despite these many commitments, he finds time to run Arkham House with its increasingly ambitious program . . . and incidentally, he does all editing, proofreading and cataloging on the books himself!

We find that Arkham House plans for 1945 line up like this. In the current year the following will be published: "Something Near," by August Derleth; "The Opener of the Way," by Robert Bloch; "Witch House," by

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Evangeline Walton; "The Hounds of Tindalos," by Frank Belknap Long, and probably one omnibus. Further anthologies—like the fine "Sleep No More," etc., collected and edited by August Derleth—are now scheduled to go to Farrar & Rinehart.

We feel we speak for the many lovers of bizarre, eerie and extraordinary fiction when we congratulate August Derleth on Arkham House and the work it is doing. Arkham, we think, deserves every success in payment for the pleasure it has brought and contemplates bringing to the thousands of "weird-tale" enthusiasts.

"New Oz Just Ain't . . . Yet!"

IN THE March Eyrie columns WEIRD TALES printed a letter by Jack Snow in which he stated that a new Oz book he had authored was "now published."

Now Mr. Snow is quick to write us, with modesty becoming an author, that he really didn't expect his story "Second Childhood" and its accompanying Eyrie notes to appear for some time. (But you can't keep a good yarn down, Jack!) Hence the phrase "now published."

Snow wants us to know that his "The Magical Mimics in Oz" will not be published until later, due to paper restrictions and prevailing conditions.

Friday Superstition

SOME time ago when Roger S. Vreeland ("A Sip With Satan" . . March WEIRD TALES) was in the office we got into an enthusiastic discussion with him about the origin of superstitions; particularly the one concerning Friday. Not so long afterward he sent us an "investigation" of the whole matter—showing what authors do with themselves when they're not authoring! Here it is. But if you

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THE WATCHERS	BLOOD FROM A STONE
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THE LOST DAY	

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best. Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City

still run into some tough luck next Friday the 13th, don't blame us!

Friday is a bad-luck day. That's a superstition that everyone knows, and it goes back to the dimmest days of recorded history although no one has been able to place a finger on the exact origin. The erudite *Encyclopedia Britannica* summarily dismisses the matter thus: "The ill-luck associated with the day arose from the connection with the Crucifixion."

Other sources indicate, however, that the paths leading into antiquity are fourfold. They lead (1) to the ancient Teuton forests; (2) among the wilds of Scandinavia; (3) to papal and thence pagan Rome; and (4) to the Far East.

Chamber's Encyclopedia: "Friday takes its name from the goddess Frigga, wife of Odin, to whom it was consecrated. The word, however, is often connected with Freyja (or Freya-R.S.V.), the goddess of love, to which notion the Latin name is due. . . . Almost everywhere within the range of Christendom, Friday is a day of proverbial ill-luck, in which it is not wise to put to sea, to marry, or commence any important undertaking. . . . Shipping statistics still (1901) show a smaller number of sailings upon that than upon any other day. It may be well for sailors to be reminded that Columbus both sailed and discovered land on Friday, and that the Pilgrim Fathers touched land on the same day."

Curiosities of Popular Customs—William S. Walsh. 1900: "It was the festival day of the Goddess Freya, the Northern Venus. The ill luck which by popular superstition is still ascribed to projects or journeys undertaken on Friday is traceable to the fact that it was originally regarded as sacred to the goddess, whose honor was held to be disregarded by all who, instead of participating in her festive worship, followed their own pursuits. On such Freya was supposed to bring ill fortune. The superstition remained after the explanation had been forgotten. No doubt the fact that Friday is associated with the Passion of Christ and that it is a day of abstinence in the Catholic Church had much to do with keeping up the feeling."

A legend in many versions and from many places, in one form tells of an Isaac Harvey of Wilmington. He was a hard-headed, matter-of-fact seafaring captain, and in order to end the Friday superstition he laid the keel

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of a brig on a Friday; fitted her out on a Friday; named her "Friday of Wilmington"; sent her out on a Friday under a Captain Friday. The ship was wrecked on the following Friday.

The Book of Days: "The Friday superstition cannot wholly be explained by the fact that it was ordained to be held a fast by the Christians of Rome. Some portions of its maleficent character is probably due to the character of the Scandinavian Venus Freya, the wife of Odin, the goddess of fecundity. But we are met on the other hand by the fact that amongst the Brahmins of India a like superstitious aversion to Friday prevails. They say that 'on this day no business must be commenced.'" . . .

Black Fridays

IN THE United States:

Sept. 24, 1869, and Sept. 19, 1873, on which financial panics occured.

In England:

Dec. 6, 1745, when news reached London that Charles Eduard, the Pretender, was at Derby with the Highlanders; May 11, 1866, a financial panic started.

Ripley, in his "Believe It, or Not," says "Friday is the luckiest day in American history." He gives the following dates:

Friday, Aug. 3, 1492—Columbus sailed for America.

Friday, Oct. 12, 1492—Columbus discovered America.

Friday, Nov. 22, 1493—Columbus landed here again.

Friday, June 12, 1494—Mainland of South America discovered.

Friday, Mar. 5, 1496—Henry VII commissioned Cabot which resulted in the discovery of North America.

Friday, Sept. 7, 1565—Mendez founded St. Augustine, Fla., the oldest city in the U. S.

Friday, Nov. 10, 1620—Pilgrim Fathers landed in harbor of Provincetown.

Friday, Feb. 22, 1732—George Washington born.

Friday, Oct. 17, 1777—Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga.

Friday, Sept. 19, 1781—Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown.

Here, however, is the most startling fact of all—though the interpretation might depend on one's viewpoint: After consulting the *World Almanac's* "Ready Reference Calendar," I discover that July 12, 1907, the day I was born, was Friday! *Roger S. Vreeland*

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